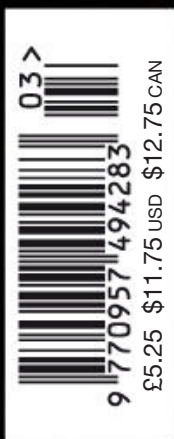


50 YEARS of THE GODFATHER

THE ULTIMATE DEEP DIVE INTO THE CRIME-FAMILY MASTERPIECE

AN AUDIENCE WITH FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA • RARE PHOTOS • INTERVIEWS WITH THE CAST

EMPIRE



MARCH
2022

**SPIDER-MAN:
NO WAY HOME**
HOW IT BLEW UP
THE BOX OFFICE

PEAKY BLINDERS
INSIDE THE FINAL SEASON

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IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE now, but at the time *The Godfather* was a major risk. Its director, Francis Ford Coppola, was coming off a small movie called *The Rain People*, which had cost just \$750,000, a sum Vito Corleone wouldn't get out of his chair for. Marlon Brando was seen as a washed-up has-been, called "box-office poison" by a high-level executive who was agitating for Charles Bronson to play the Don instead. And nobody wanted the intense 31-year-old named Al Pacino to be in it either. The production was fraught, with raging arguments, tension and probably even the odd gun stashed behind a loo.

Flash forward five decades, and nobody is taking sides against the family again. Ever. *The Godfather* is arguably the most influential drama in cinema history, referenced in everything from *The Sopranos* to *Gilmore Girls*. And what is *Succession*, but *The Godfather* with less blood and way more Fredos? Time has somehow only increased the 1972 movie's power, its rich psychological undercurrents, its sumptuous cinematography, its ability to make anyone watching instantly want a cannoli. And so quoted is its dialogue that I've made a promise to myself not to use a hackneyed "offer you can't refuse" reference on this page.

It was an easy call, then, to start the New Year by looking backwards, dedicating our issue to a celebration of the Mob masterpiece. Terri White speaks to Don Coppola himself, a fascinating and highly candid conversation about the highs and lows of the making of the film. And we catch up with many of the cast and crew, for articles packed with new revelations, wild tales and the odd cat cameo.

In short, we're pretty confident we've put together an offer you can't refuse.

Dammit.

Enjoy the issue.



Nick De Semlyen

NICK DE SEMLYEN
EDITOR

@nickdesemlyen

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This month's exclusive subscriber cover
by Mutant 101

**TURN TO PAGE 29 FOR DETAILS ON
HOW TO SUBSCRIBE**

Daniel Calderón, Garry Carbon, Marco Vittur

Empire, ISSN 0957-4948 (USPS 6398) is published every four weeks by H Bauer Publishing Ltd, Media House, Peterborough Business Park, Lynch Wood, Peterborough, PE2 6EA, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is \$111.65. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. US Postmaster: Send address changes to *Empire*, World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Bauer Media, Subscriptions, CDS Global, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Lathkill Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 9EF, United Kingdom. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

EMPIRE

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO THIS MONTH

CREATING THE GODFATHER SUBSCRIBERS' COVER



Illustrator and regular *Empire* contributor Mutant 101 was made an offer he — oh God, not again... He created our exclusive subscriber-only *Godfather* cover, and here's an in-progress shot of the handmade collage, in all its Corleone glory.

AN EXCLUSIVE PHOTOSHOOT WITH RUTH NEGGA



With Oscar buzz building for her new film *Passing*, we spoke to Ruth Negga — and had photographer Ramona Rosales (pictured above with Negga) shoot her on location in LA. See the stunning results on page 86.

THE EMPIRE PODCAST RANKS TOM CRUISE — LIVE



'The Ranking' went live this month, with *Empire* writers rating the films of Tom Cruise in front of a live London crowd. Read the results on page 118 — and head online for details of the *Empire* Podcast's 500th episode live spectacular.

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How they transformed Brando into The Don. And you thought it was all cotton wool in the cheeks.

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A tribute to the incredible career of the man who, as Fredo, broke all our hearts.

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As Tommy Shelby and his gang prepare to go out in a hail of blood and bullets, creator Steven Knight and star Cillian Murphy sit down with us for a chinwag. Peaky peaky.

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With a possible Oscar nod for *Passing* in her immediate future, we sit down for a lengthy chat with the Irish actor who is going places fast.

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Above: Marlon Brando as Don Corleone in *The Godfather*. Respect. Below: Spider-Man swings into the history books with *No Way Home*.



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Spine lines issue 397: Batman: "You're right. I was fighting a caped badass. But then we discovered his mom is named Martha, too" is from *Deadpool 2*. Catwoman: "Go back to your feline world!" is from *One Crazy Summer*. "You can ski down the pyramids. You can climb down Everest with Batman" is from *Ready Player One*.

MARK KERMODE'S FILM MUSIC SHOW IN ASSOCIATION WITH **EMPIRE**



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TALK TO US



COMMENT OF THE MONTH

ABSOLUTE CAR CRASH

I have never written a letter to a magazine before but I have also never been made to feel angry about seeing a film before. Four stars you gave this. I trusted you. Don't get me wrong, I like a good, indie, messed-up horror. The previous articles on *Titane* made it sound amazing and edgy. The review promised a lot. What in the name of the living gods of cinema did I spend two hours of my life watching? I have never walked out of a film. I talked myself down from leaving this. I wish I'd gone home and watched *White Chicks*. A statement I do not make lightly. (As much as this is tongue-in-cheek... My head physically hurts.)

FELICITY KIRKHAM, VIA EMAIL

Strong stuff, Felicity. But if Julia Ducournau's batshit film isn't provoking strong reactions, you're probably not alive. Have a Picturehouse membership — and enjoy your next cinema visit!

Picture
house

Empire's star letter wins a Picturehouse Membership, plus one for a friend! Valid for one year at 23 Picturehouse Cinemas across the UK, including the flagship Picturehouse Central in London's West End, each membership comes pre-loaded with four free tickets, and gets you access to priority booking and exclusive discounts on everything in the cinema. When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.

FLIGHT OF FANCY

Loved your review of *Movies Of 1997*. Though I took issue because Chris said, "Con Air may be the funniest movie set on an airplane. I can't think of any other contenders." Er, how about *Airplane!?*

DAVID E GATES, VIA EMAIL

Looks like Chris Hewitt picked the wrong week to quit sarcastic comments that don't always easily translate in print!



HEY @EMPIREMAGAZINE. JUST READING THE LATEST ISSUE, AND I COULD NOT AGREE MORE WITH @AMONWARMANN ABOUT ERNIE HUDSON. HE'S WONDERFUL IN *GHOSTBUSTERS* AND LONG OVERDUE MORE SCREEN TIME.

@ASHLEY_NORTHEY



ON THE NEWS THAT *SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME* HAS CROSSED \$1 BILLION AT THE BOX-OFFICE: LOOKS LIKE THERE'S A HIGH DEMAND FOR PICTURES OF SPIDER-MAN.

ANNE LAWANT

CRACKING REGIONAL EDIT, GROMIT

I'm English but live in Norway. When I saw *No Time To Die*, there was a Norwegian kids' show called 'Fantorangen' on the TV [in Madeleine's house]. I thought it was hilarious a puppet my kids watched was now a major film star! Imagine my disappointment when I found out the rest of you saw *Wallace & Gromit*.

DANNY WELSH, BERGEN

This sounds like one of those regional switch-ups that occasionally pop up. Far-flung readers: what children's TV show did you see?

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TAKE

THIS MONTH'S FILM MOMENTS THAT MATTER [EDITED BY JOHN NUGENT]



No./

1

!
SPOILER
WARNING

How Marvel used their past to change the future

Empire's Chris Hewitt on how *Spider-Man: No Way Home's* ambitious storytelling marks a new era in the MCU

SPIDER-MAN, SPIDER-Man, does whatever a spider can, apparently. That's a fairly long list, as it happens — it includes spinning webs (anytime), catching thieves (just like flies), and the most recent addition: saving cinema. Look out: here comes the four-quadrant event movie extravaganza-man.

At the time of writing, *Spider-Man: No Way Home* has pulled in almost \$1.4 billion at the worldwide box office in a little under three weeks, making it the 12th biggest movie of all time. By the time you read this, it will almost certainly be in the top ten.

All of which would be fairly noteworthy in *normal* times. These are not normal times. Since the pandemic began in 2020, the rules governing box office have had to be rewritten, almost in real time. With consumer confidence rocked, and cinemas closing across the globe, box office has taken a hit across the board. Mega-franchises such as *Bond* and *Fast & Furious* haven't got anywhere close to hitting a billion.

So, to not only reach the ten-figure mark, but to do it at speed, is astonishing. *Spider-Man: No Way Home* is re-writing the rules. It would be simple to chalk up Spidey's big bucks to being



Left: Triple threat — previous Spidey actors Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield cameos alongside Tom Holland's superhero in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. Could this lead to a further fusing of the old and the new in future Marvel films?

bad guys in tandem is a powerful one, and may well be largely responsible for the repeat business that took *No Way Home* over the top.

There is danger in embracing nostalgia so openly, of course. But in looking to its past, the MCU may have unlocked its future. A few years ago, when the MCU was still only a few films old and the first tentative steps onto the small screen had taken place, the phrase "It's All Connected" was regularly deployed to reassure people that, while it may not seem like it, über-moody Netflix series such as *Daredevil* and *Jessica Jones* and the gonzo network show *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.* were as much a part of Kevin Feige's fiefdom as Iron Man, Captain America and the gang.

Yet the gesture was a hollow one. There were vague mentions of big, green guys and magic hammers in the Netflix shows, and actual cameos from the likes of Samuel L. Jackson and Jaimie Alexander in *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, but it became increasingly clear that the TV-show arm of Marvel was floating away from the rest of the body. It wasn't all connected, after all.

Now, all the dots are joined up again. Anything is possible. The advent of the MCU shows on Disney+ — crucially overseen by Feige, in a way that previous TV shows were not — has also been important. One of *No Way Home*'s smaller but most satisfying surprises was the early appearance of Matt Murdock, the blind lawyer who is the alter-ego of *Daredevil*. Rather than recast the role, he was played by Charlie Cox, last seen getting cancelled on Netflix despite a compelling arc. That very same week, *Daredevil*'s arch-villain, Kingpin, rocked up on Disney+'s *Hawkeye*, with Vincent D'Onofrio reprising the role. The trailer for *Doctor Strange In The Multiverse Of Madness* shows Benedict Cumberbatch battling an evil version of his character that originated in the animated Disney+ show, *What If...?* It's all reconnected.

Where the MCU goes from here is uncertain, but it's going to be fun finding out. It seems unlikely that nostalgia will become a narcotic for Feige and his amazing friends — don't expect 'Daredevil: No Way Home', in which Charlie Cox teams up with Ben Affleck, and don't bet the house on Wesley Snipes showing up to assist Mahershala Ali's Blade — and there's a danger of storytelling being overridden in the name of fan service. But if deployed correctly, it opens the door to tantalising prospects. If Marvel and Sony weren't already thinking of giving Garfield another crack at the spider-whip, they surely are now. It might be the way that the X-Men are introduced to the MCU. It could lead to a series of movies that fuse the old and the new, event movies that demand your eyes on the screen, and your bums in the seat. Cinema, in the time of Covid, has often seemed stumbling and directionless. *No Way Home* may just have shown everyone the way home.

part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but last year, *Black Widow*, *Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings* and *Eternals* all pulled in *only* around \$400 million each. That sound you can hear is the world's smallest violin playing just for Disney shareholders.

How, then, did *No Way Home* buck the trend to trend in bucks? The answer may lie in a major development that comes roughly halfway through the movie. After *Loki* introduced the notion of the Multiverse, and the notion that there are infinite universes existing alongside each other, *No Way Home* is the first MCU movie

to play with the possibilities. Thanks to an errant Doctor Strange spell, by this point we've already seen Peter Parker battle a motley crew of miscreants (Doc Ock! Green Goblin! Electro! The sandy bloke!) from previous non-MCU Spider-Man movies, with those cannily reimagined as alternate universes. But at a certain point, the ante is considerably upped, when a portal is opened, and Andrew Garfield's Spider-Man steps through, to be followed a few minutes later by Tobey Maguire, the original big-screen Peter Parker. The rush of seeing, eventually, three Spider-Men swinging around and taking down

No./ 2

Why *Dog* isn't the film you think it is

It might resemble the next *Turner & Hooch*, but Channing Tatum's directorial debut **DOG** is looking to pack some emotional heft



AT FIRST GLANCE, Channing Tatum's filmmaking debut *Dog* — co-directed with longstanding producer Reid Carolin — appears to be a heartfelt comedy about an army veteran (played by Tatum) and his bond with a mischievous hound. It is, in fact, the pair's attempt to shake up the genre entirely. Speaking to *Empire*, Tatum and Carolin reveal how they set out to reinvent the dog-buddy movie.

THEY WANTED TO SHOW VETERANS AS THEY REALLY ARE

Reid Carolin: We made really close friends with a lot of vets through the film that we first met on [2008 war drama] *Stop-Loss*, and then again on an HBO documentary that we produced called *War Dogs*. *Stop-Loss* is where the journey to this film really began; in many ways *Dog* is a continuation of that world.

No./ 3

HALO'S HECTIC JOURNEY

After 20 years, a live-action **Halo** series is finally coming to TV — but it was a very bumpy road to get there...

2002

Hollywood starts sniffing around a *Halo* adaptation. Talks with Microsoft and developers Bungie begin. Bungie says no, wanting more control.

2004

Bungie decides to finance its own script. Alex Garland has his script delivered to the studio by couriers dressed as Master Chief.

2005

Universal and Fox greenlight a film with Peter Jackson producing. It's happening!

2006

Jackson picks some young punk named Neill Blomkamp to direct. But then, Universal and Fox pull the plug. It's not happening!

2007

Blomkamp says the movie is dead. He does, however, create the *Landfall* shorts that lead into *Halo 3*.

2007-2012

Just, like, a lot of "It's happening!", "It's dead!", on repeat.

2012

343 Industries take over as game developer with a live-action web series. *Halo* movie now a distant dream.





Channing Tatum: I've shared a lot of very intimate time with vets, and some are my dearest friends. I've found that most stories about veterans tend to either show them as heroes making sacrifices for their country, or as being traumatised by the things they've done. They're always defined by their service. What was most meaningful to us was to portray them as multi-dimensional humans who are both flawed and heroic.



From far left: Walkies! US army ranger Briggs (Channing Tatum) and co-star Lulu, a Belgian Malinois, hit the beach; Tatum, who is directing his first feature, with *Dog* co-director Carolin Reid on set.

THE FILM IS INSPIRED BY THEIR OWN DOGS

Tatum: My dog was dying and so we went on one last road trip together. When I came back I told the boys at the office about the experience and how emotional it was, and that's really where the story came from. We wanted to make it a feelgood movie, though, and have people enjoy the experience of being in the theatre, because every time we told people we were making a dog movie they were like, "Does the dog die? I don't want to watch the dog die!"

THEY PICKED UP TIPS FROM SOME OLD FRIENDS

Tatum: I've got to work with some legendary filmmakers: the Coen brothers, [Phil] Lord and [Christopher] Miller, Quentin Tarantino. Everyone works differently, so I got to watch them and cherry-pick what would work best for us.

Carolin: Steven Soderbergh [who worked with

the pair on the *Magic Mike* franchise] has had the biggest influence on us. He even sent us a document called 'How To Direct' at one point, and has been so helpful along the way. But at some point you have to go and do it your own way — that's when the fun starts.

THEY DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE *TURNER & HOOGH*, BUT IT STILL PLAYED A PART IN THE FILM

Tatum: I really enjoyed that film as a kid; it's Tom Hanks and a dog, what's not to like? In terms of acting with the dog, I actually took a lot of inspiration from that movie. Then *Benji* was also a big hitter for me. I tried to show my daughter that movie and we didn't make it through; she just cried and cried. I was thinking, "Man, my parents let me watch this as a child? What's wrong with my parents?"

BETH WEBB

DOG IS IN CINEMAS FROM 18 FEBRUARY

Year	Event
2013	The <i>Halo</i> TV series is announced alongside <i>Halo 5: Guardians</i> ! Steven Spielberg is attached! Then, silence.
2014	Out of nowhere, the Ridley Scott-produced web series <i>Halo: Nightfall</i> launches, dubiously linked to the TV show.
2015	<i>Halo</i> TV series is set to launch with <i>Halo 5: Guardians</i> . Then doesn't.
2018	It's finally happening: Showtime orders ten episodes of <i>Halo</i> , with Kyle Killen showrunning and Rupert Wyatt directing.
2019	Oops, Rupert Wyatt's <i>not</i> directing, Otto Bathurst is; Showtime cuts episode count to nine, but Pablo Schreiber is cast as Master Chief!
LATE 2019	They're dropping like flies — Kyle Killen quietly steps down as showrunner, before production begins.
2021	Showtime is out, as <i>Halo</i> moves to Paramount+. Co-showrunner Steven Kane steps down, after filming is completed.
DEC 2021	<i>Halo</i> trailer is released! It's happening! Again! For real!
2022, PROBABLY	The <i>Halo</i> TV series is finally set to debut in early 2022. A new showrunner is still needed — if a Season 2 happens. MATT KAMEN

The gang's all here:
Beloved characters Big Bird, Cookie
Monster, Elmo, Count von Count, Ernie
and Mr Snuffleupagus — along with the
rest of their famous furry friends — pose
with the cast of the show in the '90s.

No. 4 How Sesame Street blazed a trail

A new doc examines the iconic show's rule-breaking approach

FOR OVER 50 years, *Sesame Street* has been educating pre-schoolers and slyly amusing adults. In her new documentary, *Street Gang: How We Got To Sesame Street*, Marilyn Agrelo explores the show's early years. For all its cuddly Muppets and fun with numbers, this was a series born from social unrest and a desire to change the world. Here are four things you probably don't know about the most popular kids' show in the world.



1 IT WAS FOUNDED BY ACTIVISTS
Agrelo calls *Street Gang* “a story of a reckoning [in America] and people that had an ideal.” In 1969, when Joan Ganz Cooney and Lloyd Morrisett launched *Sesame Street*, America was in a time of great flux. “The Civil Rights Movement, the anti-Vietnam War protests, the Women’s Liberation Movement, all these things were coming up,” says Agrelo. Cooney, one of the first female executives in US TV, wanted the show to speak to children largely ignored by television, in an inner-city setting that looked like their lives (with added puppets). “This group of activists got together, each with a different artistic skill set. Their goal was to reach children of colour and disadvantaged children.”



2 IT WAS SO RADICAL IT WAS BANNED IN MISSISSIPPI
From day one, *Sesame Street* focused on representing everyone. The cast included actors, and children, of multiple ethnicities. It welcomed guests who addressed issues other shows wouldn't touch. “It was surprising to find this footage of Jesse Jackson leading kids in a Black Power chant,” Agrelo says of one clip in the film in which Jackson tells children to insist they matter. “It would never happen on television today.” Not everyone liked it. *Sesame Street*'s diversity saw it briefly banned in Mississippi in 1970, for being too integrated.



3 JIM HENSON WAS NOT ITS CREATOR
It's often assumed that Jim Henson was the show's main creative force, but it was actually producer and writer Jon Stone who hired Henson and steered *Sesame Street*. “He put a unique stamp on this show,” says Agrelo. “All the writers came from late-night TV. They were writing on a sophisticated level that spoke to social and political satire, but also in a way that a child could grasp and find funny. That had never been attempted before.”



4 NO ISSUE WAS OFF LIMITS
Over its 52 years, *Sesame Street* has always talked to children honestly about the world. From developing a happy HIV-positive Muppet to Big Bird getting vaccinated against Covid-19, no subject is ‘too adult’. That ethos was cemented when cast member Will Lee, aka Mr Hooper, died in 1982. Shortly afterwards, the cast explained to an upset Big Bird that Mr Hooper was not coming back and that people die. “It was so important that [even] TV networks that were not airing *Sesame Street* promoted it,” says Agrelo. “It was a perfect example of how *Sesame Street* taught a lesson.” **OLLY RICHARDS**

STREET GANG: HOW WE GOT TO SESAME STREET IS ON DIGITAL
FROM 31 JANUARY

SMALL
TALKJEFFREY
WRIGHT

Hi, Jeffrey. How are things going with you right now?

Oh, it's going reasonably well.

Only reasonably?

Well, such are the times. Where are you?

We're based in the UK.

Yes. So, in the tradition of the British, you have to pretend it's going fantastic [laughs].

Exactly. Keep calm and carry on, and all that.

But, no, honestly it's a shitshow over here.

[Laughs] Well, now we're in the same world!

Speaking of being in the same world, we loved *The French Dispatch* — as magazine journalists, it really resonated.

Well, I'm glad to hear that, thank you. I think writers and language — particularly in America right now and particularly at this time — deserve to be celebrated, after all they and we have suffered through here, as regards to those things.

Not that we're putting ourselves on the same level as your character in the film, or, you know, James Baldwin!

Well, it's just a hint of James Baldwin. Not entirely James Baldwin by any stretch of the imagination. But thank you!

DAN JOLIN

THE BATMAN IS IN CINEMAS

FROM 4 MARCH



Peter Bogdanovich, photographed exclusively for *Empire* in 2017 by Steve Schofield.

The many faces of Peter Bogdanovich

[IN MEMORIAM] The filmmaker behind *The Last Picture Show*, who died this month, loved cinema in many forms

THE FILM JOURNALIST

Peter Bogdanovich was a fanboy before the term existed. Between the ages of 12 and 30, he kept track of the films he saw on 3" x 5" index cards, racking up 5,316 flicks. In the '60s, he started doing reviews and feature articles for *Esquire* — he did set visits for Howard Hawks' *El Dorado* and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* — and even named his 1951 Ford Convertible 'John Ford'. In a decade that saw US critics go crazy for Euro art cinema, Bogdanovich was a cheerleader for unsung traditional American filmmakers.

THE DIRECTOR

Bogdanovich crossed the critic-filmmaker divide with *Targets*, the excellent Roger Corman-sponsored horror flick, which brilliantly utilised Boris Karloff outtakes. His best work — from the sublime *The Last Picture Show* to the screwball *What's Up, Doc?*, from the bittersweet *Paper Moon* to the compelling *Saint Jack* — perfectly walked a tightrope between old-school and modern Hollywood. His films, even flops such as *At Long Last Love*, coursed with a love of movies through every frame.

THE ACTOR

Aged 15, the precocious Bogdanovich studied acting with the legendary Stella Adler. The director continued thesping, including appearances in his own films — his voiceover as a DJ on *The Last Picture Show* inspired Quentin Tarantino to hire him as the radio announcer in the *Kill Bill* movies. He acted mostly on TV (*Moonlighting*, *How I Met Your Mother*), playing his most famous role, Dr Elliot Kupferberg, the therapist's therapist on *The Sopranos*, for six years — the water bottle Kupferberg regularly drank from was Bogdanovich's own.



Above, top: Bogdanovich with Orson Welles during filming of the long-lost classic *The Other Side Of The Wind*. Above: Barbra Streisand and Ryan O'Neal in 1972's *What's Up, Doc?*

THE HISTORIAN

Perhaps Bogdanovich's biggest contribution to film came as a champion of classic Hollywood. As a young buck, he not only programmed forgotten films at the Museum Of Modern Art, wrote monographs and made documentaries, but also provided tangible support for his cinematic heroes (he let Orson Welles stay in his Bel Air mansion when the auteur had financial problems). In his later years, he taught film at universities, introduced classics on TCM and campaigned for film preservation, playing a pivotal role in restoring Welles' missing masterpiece *The Other Side Of The Wind*. Whatever he did, the man's passion for picture shows knew no bounds. IAN FREER



No./

6

Place your Oscar bets now...

With the nominations announcement only weeks away, we lay out the runners and riders for the tightest Best Picture race in years

THE DEAD CERTS

WEST SIDE STORY

Why Oscar voters might go for it: Come on! It's Steven Spielberg! Everything — from the grand directorial scope and timely pro-immigrant message to the glowing reviews — points to awards glory here.

Why they might not: Despite a rapturous reception, *West Side Story* has struggled to make an impact at the box office, which might dampen its chances. Plus, Ansel Elgort's presence in the film has slightly weakened enthusiasm for some.

BELFAST

Why Oscar voters might go for it: A heartfelt, deeply personal biopic from a much-admired industry veteran makes a lot of sense for the Academy. Despite being the first man to be nominated in five different categories, director Kenneth Branagh has never won an Oscar — the



Illustration: Russell Moorcroft

kind of always-the-bridesmaid narrative beloved of awards watchers. Sixth time's the charm?

Why they might not: The decision to shoot in black-and-white might turn off some younger members of the Academy. This was another box-office disappointment, too, which means fewer eyeballs, in spite of awards screeners.

THE POWER OF THE DOG

Why Oscar voters might go for it: Jane Campion's return to the big screen was a critical smash, with her eighth film sweeping the board at several influential critics' association awards. The Academy may also want to correct its shocking record on female directors — and who better than Campion?

Why they might not: Compared to some of the joyous, crowd-pleasing contenders, this is a dark, brooding, slow-burn of a film which could leave some voters cold — and its uncompromising take on masculinity and sexuality might alienate the Academy's sizeable conservative wing.

THE SOLID POSSIBILITIES

DUNE

Why Oscar voters might go for it: A rare film that combines box-office power, arthouse sensibilities and critical cred, *Dune* is arguably Denis Villeneuve's best chance yet at winning; his most lauded previous showing was *Arrival*, which earned eight nominations but was largely overlooked.

Why they might not: Though it could manage a few nominations in the major categories, *Dune* may end up being a victim of its own success: perhaps considered too 'mainstream' to win anything outside of the technicals.

NIGHTMARE ALLEY

Why Oscar voters might go for it: The Academy loves a movie which tips a hat to cinema history, and Guillermo del Toro's gorgeous film noir is an affectionate doff to Hollywood's Golden Age. The Academy also loves GDT, as demonstrated by his 2017 Best Picture win for *The Shape Of Water*.

Why they might not: There may be a sense that del Toro has had his 'turn' after winning with his fish-based romance. Plus his more gory proclivities in this film might turn off the more squeamish among the voter base.

LICORICE PIZZA

Why Oscar voters might go for it: This is a film which has earned Paul Thomas Anderson some of the best reviews of his career — and it's a nostalgic, hazy look at 1970s Southern California, which will appeal directly to the many Oscar voters who, like Anderson, specifically remember that time and place.

Why they might not: PTA has rarely been able to convert Oscar nominations into wins; his idiosyncratic style, and a couple of social-media storms over some controversial choices in the film, could keep that trend going here.

THE OUTSIDE CHANCES

FLEE

Why Oscar voters might go for it: There is a ton of buzz for this animated documentary about an Afghan refugee. Selected as the Danish entry for Best International Feature Film, and with US distributor Neon (who pulled off *Parasite*'s 2020 win) campaigning hard, this could be an upset.

Why they might not: No documentary has ever had a Best Picture nod, and only three animated films have (*Beauty And The Beast*, *Toy Story 3*, *Up*). An animated doc, though? Unprecedented.

SUMMER OF SOUL

Why Oscar voters might go for it: Ahmir Thompson's debut film about the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival has won nearly every critics' association award it's been nominated for.

Why they might not: That aforementioned allergy to documentaries.

PARALLEL MOTHERS

Why Oscar voters might go for it: Pedro Almodóvar is no stranger to Oscars, winning his first in 1988, and picking up a rare Spanish-language Best Screenplay gong in 2002 for *Talk To Her*. His latest is as good as he's ever been.

Why they might not: Only 12 non-English-language films have ever been nominated for Best Picture. Getting past the "one-inch-tall barrier of subtitles" (as Bong Joon-ho put it) will still be too much for some voters.

SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME

Why Oscar voters might go for it: The first film to make a billion dollars in the pandemic era, Spidey is seen as an industry saviour. Marvel and Sony are aggressively campaigning in "all categories" — including Best Picture.

Why they might not: Only two comic-book movies have ever even been nominated for Best Picture — *Black Panther* and *Joker*. There is a reality in the multiverse where Spider-Man wins a Best Picture Oscar, but it's unlikely we're living in it. **JOHN NUGENT**

No./7

"I need to think of some ways to wield my MBE"

[THE Q & A] From complex baddies in *His Dark Materials* to finding the grey in new drama *True Things*, **RUTH WILSON** is embracing the messiness

RUTH WILSON LOVES complicated characters. In director Harry Wootliff's *True Things*, adapted from Deborah Kay Davies' novel *True Things About Me*, she plays Kate, an unassuming young woman who finds herself in a turbulent affair with an erratic man she calls Blond (Tom Burke). It's a typically intense role. As she bids farewell to *His Dark Materials*' formidable Mrs Coulter and prepares for a one-woman stage adaptation of Jean Cocteau's *The Human Voice* in the West End, Wilson tells us that she's never one to run away from a challenge.

You've spoken to *Empire* before about playing people with, well, a lot on their plate. Kate is certainly that... It's in my wheelhouse [laughs]. I think everyone's really complex. So whenever I get a character, even if it's simple on the page, I'll put loads of stuff into it. It's about finding the light and shade in all these people. The duality of humankind is fascinating. Kate is very complex. And this film is so subjective, you're just watching her be. I wasn't trying to tell the audience what to think, I was just letting the camera watch me.

You're a producer here — how did you develop it with the director? For four years we sat in a room, anecdoting and sharing experiences. Just what we know of being women in the world. Moving a bit away from the book and into what we found really interesting — the first moments of a relationship, and what you project onto it. Is it only sexual desire? When does it turn into love? And is it love? Or the need to fulfil other people's expectations? What drives the denial of the reality of who this other person really is?



And he [Blond] does make her feel good. The drama of that relationship makes her feel alive. It's really complex!

Some reviewers have called Blond a cad. But it's an abusive, controlling relationship. What

Top: Welcome to the dark side — Ruth Wilson. **Above:** The actor as Kate with Tom Burke as Blond in *True Things*.

discussions did you have about that?

Everyone has a different opinion, about every character. People pull out what they recognise, or what they don't like. I always felt that Kate has more control in the scenario — she picks him, texts him, pursues him. She appears the victim, but she's engaging in this relationship, and consenting to it. I think it's so interesting, what people take from it. The amount of chat that Harry and I had over the years makes it all sort of grey.

You just finished filming the final season of *His Dark Materials*. What was it like

letting go of Mrs Coulter?

I was ready to leave. I love creating things, I'm not so good at sustaining stuff. Mrs Coulter is iconic, she's brilliant, and the challenges of this season were really good because she becomes a goodie, so, how do I manage that? It's a fine line to go from a fun baddie into that.

Have kids been scared of you since you've played her?

No. Well, a few. My nephew watched the first season, and that Christmas he looked at me in a different way. "Who are you, really? I'm not sure I trust you. I'm not sure I know who you are." But now he loves me.

You're prepping for a one-woman production of *The Human Voice*. Is it daunting?

It's really hard. It's a conversation on the phone and you never hear the other side of it, which isn't written. That's what I have to do now: write the other side, and work out how I would interact. And you always dread a phone-call scene. So it's gonna be madness. It's going to put me into a place of madness. But it's really interesting. Jean Cocteau wrote it in the 1920s, in response to his actresses moaning that they never got a monologue, so he went, "Here you go, then." But I'm avoiding it at the moment. I have to sit down to start on it. That's when I'll get daunted.

You were made an MBE this year. How are you wielding your new power?

I haven't received it yet, because there's a massive backlog from Covid, so I'll get it next year. I need to think of some ways to wield my MBE. Wear my badge out in public. Get some seats in some restaurants. **ALEX GODFREY**

TRUE THINGS IS IN CINEMAS FROM 11 MARCH

No./8 Inside the movie that will take 20 years to film

Merrily We Roll Along started filming last year — and, as star Beanie Feldstein explains, should be done by around 2040

AS BEANIE FELDSTEIN, star of forthcoming musical *Merrily We Roll Along*, puts it, “It is a real lesson in delayed gratification!” She’s not kidding: the word “forthcoming” is doing a lot of work there. The Broadway musical, written by the late Stephen Sondheim, tracks the lives of three friends, beginning in 1976, and working backwards through their lives to 1957. On stage, this meant a lot of make-up for the actors. On screen, director Richard Linklater (who previously spent 12 years making



Left: Beanie Feldstein, who will star in the film in stages over the next two decades. Above: Director Richard Linklater.

Boyhood) is doing it for real, filming in chunks every couple of years for the next two decades.

Feldstein, a self-professed theatre kid, is effusive about the project. “My soul and my blood are made of Sondheim,” she says. “I am a walking fanatic. And then Rich’s movies — if you love movies, you can’t not love his movies.” If you’re going to do a job for most of your life, might as well make it a good one, then? “To return to it throughout the next two decades of my whole life — which is insane because I’ve only lived about two-and-a-half, three — feels surreal.”

More meaningful still is the fact this is a film about friendship and Feldstein will star alongside Ben Platt, her real-life bestie since she was 14. “I think the thing I’m most proud of in the beginning of my working life was that most of my projects revolved around friendships,” she says — from the teenage kinship of *Lady Bird* to the heartbreak of her recent role in *Impeachment: American Crime Story*. “*Merrily...* is the story of three friends from the end to the beginning,” she says, “and so I’m proud to continue that exploration [of friendship] in my work.”

It’s an exploration that will require patience, though. With the first portion already filmed, the cast and crew will reunite every year or two until the actors are in their late forties. “It does make people become existential,” says Feldstein, with a laugh. “They’re like: ‘Wait, *how* old will I be?’ Don’t think about it!” **JOHN NUGENT**

MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG IS IN CINEMAS IN 2040. PROBABLY.

[TREND REPORT]

No./9 BOND FILMS IN FILMS

No Time To Die wasn’t the only Bond film of the past 12 months — 007 has been keeping the British end up all over the place

WORDS JOHN NUGENT
ILLUSTRATIONS BILL McCONKEY



MOONRAKER BLACK WIDOW

From one spy to another... Natasha Romanoff (Scarlett Johansson), in her solo film, is revealed to be a secret fan of Roger Moore’s 1979 cheese-fest, and can quote it verbatim.



THUNDERBALL LAST NIGHT IN SOHO

When Eloise (Thomasin McKenzie) first steps back in time in Edgar Wright’s thriller, it’s a classic 1965 Bond poster looming over her as she emerges into the bright lights of London’s West End.



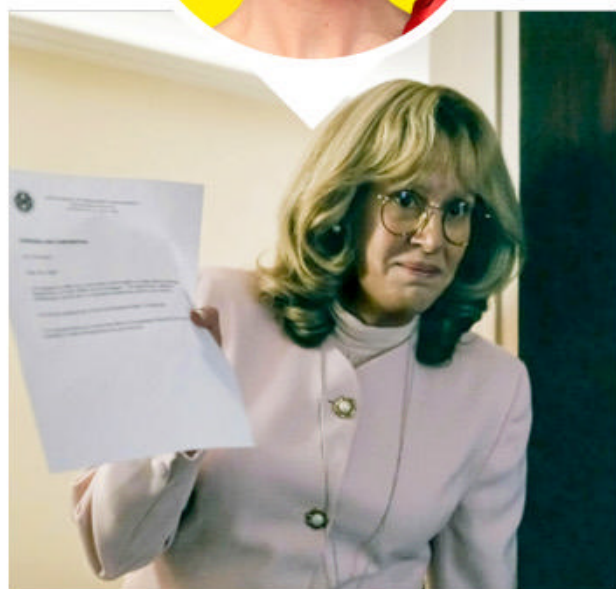
LIVE AND LET DIE LICORICE PIZZA

Another 007-as-indicator-of-time-period: here, 1973’s *Live And Let Die* appears in Paul Thomas Anderson’s comedy drama, on the marquee of the historic El Portal theatre in North Hollywood.

No./10

Hollywood's prosthetics renaissance

Now more than ever, film's most famous faces are being transformed — into penguins, televangelists and more. The people behind it all explain how and why



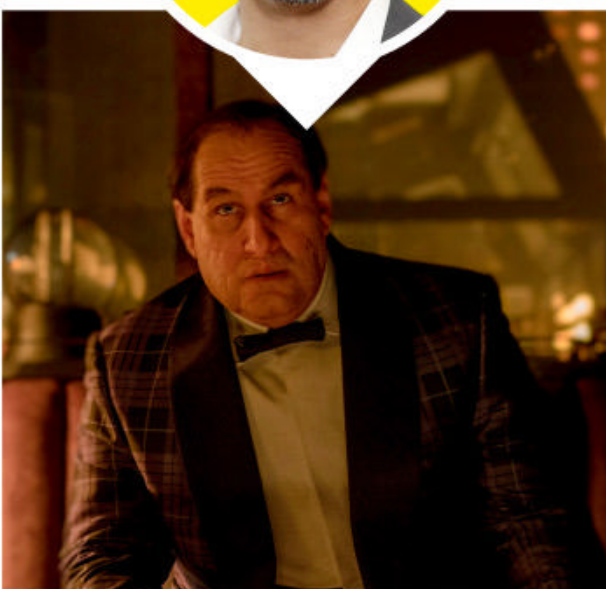
SARAH PAULSON
LINDA TRIPP

PROSTHETIC MAKE-UP DESIGNER: **JUSTIN RALEIGH**
TIME IN THE CHAIR: **JUST UNDER THREE HOURS**

To become White House whistleblower Linda Tripp, who was instrumental in the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal put to screen in Ryan Murphy's *Impeachment: American Crime Story*, Sarah Paulson underwent a surprisingly subtle physical transformation. Prosthetic make-up designer Justin Raleigh worked with Murphy to fine-tune the changes, which included a new neck, nose, dental veneers, and a bodysuit for the actor. "Ryan wanted to see more of Sarah,"

Raleigh explains. "He was worried that if we pushed the likeness, which included a lot of the weight gain, that it might be a little garish or take away from the performance."

Still, such an extreme transformation was somewhat familiar ground for Paulson and Murphy, whose longstanding collaboration has seen the former play, among other things, a two-headed woman in *American Horror Story*. *Impeachment* was a 100-day shoot, which meant 100 individual castings for Paulson plus an array of "finite and delicate" pieces of make-up to help her become Tripp.

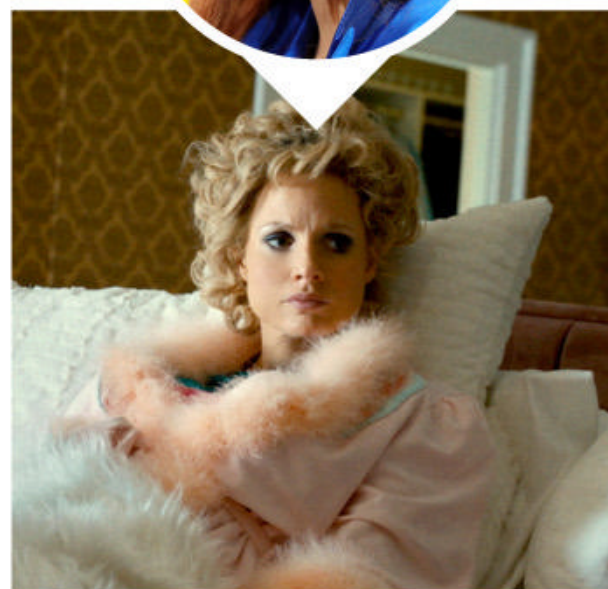


COLIN FARRELL
THE PENGUIN

PROSTHETIC MAKE-UP DESIGNER **MIKE MARINO**
TIME IN THE CHAIR **BETWEEN SIX AND EIGHT HOURS**

While Matt Reeves' *The Batman* has garnered hype for Robert Pattinson's big arrival as the new caped crusader, Colin Farrell's mega metamorphosis into the Penguin, aka Oswald Chesterfield Cobblepot, has proven an equally major talking point. Reeves was initially inspired by Farrell's transformation in *The North Water*, for which the actor had just put on some serious weight. But Farrell declined to keep on the extra pounds, so new cheeks, a nose, dental veneers, a neck-piece and a bodysuit turned the actor into the villainous Oz instead. Reeves says he was adamant that Farrell's talent as an actor would not be compromised. "It can't interfere with the emotion; I didn't want a mask," he recalls telling his prosthetic make-up designer Mike Marino.

The results surprised him: "It was so much further than I had ever imagined. I just felt like coming off that sculpture was this radiating character," Reeves says. "I actually don't know Colin as much as I know Oz, because he almost always spoke in character, and that's the way he looked."



JESSICA CHASTAIN
TAMMY FAYE

SPECIAL MAKE-UP EFFECTS CREATED AND
APPLIED BY **JUSTIN RALEIGH**
TIME IN THE CHAIR **1 HOUR 15 FOR STAGE ONE, TWO
HOURS FOR STAGE TWO, 2.5 HOURS FOR STAGE THREE**

Jessica Chastain had plenty to learn about televangelist Tammy Faye to play her in *The Eyes Of Tammy Faye*, but the first thing she had to accept was that she could never really be her. "She had to understand it's never going to be a perfect likeness, as everybody's proportions are different," Justin Raleigh, her special-effects make-up artist, explains. Chastain's modifications changed in phases to match Faye's timeline in the film. Initially, the actor was given two cheek-pieces, a chin, and a piece of tape to give her more visible nostril openings. To become Faye a few years later, she donned a new neck, larger cheeks, a larger chin and fake lips. "About two-thirds of her face is covered in prosthetics," Raleigh says. "You want to keep it as subtle as possible, even when you're pushing things as far as possible." The result?

A transformation pushing the limits of both prosthetic and beauty make-up — to understand the mindset of a woman who had no limits when it came to her work, marriage, faith and sense of self.

BLACK IN FOCUS

AMON WARMANN chews over the main moment in Black film and TV this month



STEVEN SPIELBERG'S WEST SIDE STORY HAVING NO SUBTITLES IS A POWERFUL CORRECTIVE

TO LIVE IN the Warmann household is to be privy to many conversations between my mum and her Nigerian friends. One thing about those tête-à-têtes that always sticks out to me is that every now and then, the occasional bit of English will be thrown in amidst the Engenni language she speaks, helping to give me an idea of what's being discussed. The last place I expected to hear that same switch between dialects was in Steven Spielberg's *West Side Story* remake, but it was very welcome. Better still, when the Spanish dialogue came, it wasn't accompanied by subtitles.

It's a notable corrective in a film that's brimming with smart updates from both the 1957 stage musical and the 1961 film adaptation, including the ensemble of Latino actors playing the Sharks, a much-needed change to the original's slew of white actors wearing brownface. The lack of Spanish subtitles feels like a natural extension of that change. In an interview with *IGN*, Spielberg stated that, "If I subtitled the Spanish I'd simply be doubling down on the English and giving English the power over the Spanish. This was not going to happen in this film. I needed to respect the language enough to not subtitle it."

The greatest director of all time has a point, and it's accentuated by a sharp Tony



"I needed to respect the language" — director Steven Spielberg deliberately chose not to use English subtitles for Spanish dialogue in his version of *West Side Story*.

Kushner screenplay which deepens the racial tensions that have always been inherent in the story that has many white characters saying, "Speak English," throughout the film. The lack of subtitles in the moments when the Sharks are

singing and conversing with each other is a small change that has a big impact, because it centres and celebrates Latino culture instead of othering it.

Furthermore, subtitles are simply unnecessary in Spielberg's update. The expressive acting from Rachel Zegler, David Alvarez, Ariana DeBose and others, along with the assured direction, ensures that we're never lost as to what's going on in any given scene.

To be clear, this is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Indeed, subtitles are often necessary in allowing audiences to engage in worlds they're unfamiliar with. But there are plenty of instances where characters switch between English and their native language, and those films and TV shows would do well to follow *West Side Story*'s example. Because sometimes authenticity — and not outright knowledge — is the path to greater understanding.

CLASSIC PICK OF THE MONTH

GIRLHOOD (2014)

Céline Sciamma's third feature is a coming-of-age drama that follows 16-year-old Marieme (Karidja Touré) as she joins an all-girl gang in the Paris projects. Come for the iconic 'Diamonds' sequence, stay for the honest, multifaceted depiction of female friendship.



JARED LETO PAOLO GUCCI

PROSTHETIC DESIGNER **GÖRAN LUNDSTRÖM**
TIME IN THE CHAIR **FOUR HOURS**

Göran Lundström was given just three weeks to figure out how to turn Jared Leto into fashion-house heir Paolo Gucci in Ridley Scott's *House Of Gucci*. Lundström stepped in as a last-minute replacement on the shoot, and only managed to consult with Leto on the part, never with Scott directly. "Jared read the script for another part, but he loved Paolo Gucci so much that it was his idea to do something make-up-wise, as he doesn't fit the character physically," Lundström explains. Leto's drastic transformation included a three-piece bald cap, a new nose, and a neck-piece. "I think we did the look 12 times while filming, and towards the tenth I finally started understanding it. I'm as surprised as everyone else that it looks pretty good!" Lundström says. The metamorphosis reflects Leto's all-or-nothing mindset: he wouldn't turn up to set without his prosthetics, not wanting to recognise his own reflection in the mirror. "I don't know if he cared what other people saw, but he didn't want to see it," Lundström says. Whatever his process, we ended up with a truly memorable creation — a character with, as Leto puts it, "olive oil for blood". **ELLA KEMP**

No./11

Is this 2022's weirdest film?

First-time director Brian Petsos unravels some of the biggest mysteries behind his bizarre-looking dark ensemble comedy **BIG GOLD BRICK**

WHY IS ANDY GARCIA GAZING INTO THE DISTANCE?

The genesis for *Big Gold Brick* came when a friend of filmmaker Brian Petsos was “attacked with a brick”. (“He’s fine now,” Petsos clarifies.) This encounter inspired the key moment in the film where Floyd (played by Andy Garcia) hits Samuel (played by Emory Cohen) with his car; the pair end up living together. Samuel then writes a biography about Floyd. Things only get weirder. “The film goes from head-injury absurdity into actual absurdity,” Petsos explains.

AND WHAT IS MEGAN FOX DOING HERE?

Megan Fox has a proven record in handling off-kilter comedy, but Petsos was still nervous about approaching her for his debut. “I didn’t think Megan would do this part,” Petsos says. Fortunately, the actor “absolutely got where I was coming from”. She plays Floyd’s second wife, and Petsos maintains she has “real-world status” — as opposed to, say, the comet seen below her on the poster, which hints at some otherworldly diversions in the film.

WHAT’S THE DEAL WITH THE CREEPY TOY SANTA?

Central to the film’s weirdness is this talking Santa Claus doll. “Like a lot of other artists, I tend to fetishise certain things,” says Petsos. “Santa is a big thing for me.” In the film, Samuel begins talking to the doll after his accident; it even becomes a twisted love interest, of sorts. “They end up having a brief... I’ll call it ‘relationship’,” Petsos explains. “Until it gets untenable.” As well it might. The film’s art team sourced multiple vintage dolls to find one just strange enough for the film.

WHY IS OSCAR ISAAC WEARING A SUNGLASSES EYEPATCH?

Everything about Isaac’s eccentric character Anselm screams villain, from his ambiguous accent — “It’s British with a Germanic offshoot” — to his all-black attire and eyepatch-style gold glasses. Petsos describes his performance as “past a ten. It’s right up there at 15 or 16. It’s comedic Shakespeare.” The exact nature of the character remains under wraps, but he does say that “by the time we get to Oscar, the film is spun out of control”.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A “CEREBRAL” COMEDY, ANYWAY?

The curious tagline — “a ‘cerebral’ comedy” — came to Petsos after he edited the film. Sure, the wordplay riffs off the brain injury that ties the film together, but Petsos hints at a “double meaning in there”. It speaks to the weirdness of the project: “At the risk of sounding super-pretentious, what I do is art-making first, but entertainment is really crucial as well.

It’s a strange mix.” **BETH WEBB**

BIG GOLD BRICK DOES NOT CURRENTLY

HAVE A UK RELEASE DATE



No./12

Betty White's stellar final act

[IN MEMORIAM] **How the late *Golden Girls* star became the pop-culture icon everyone wanted to work with**

BETTY WHITE APPEARED to be all sweetness on the outside, but inside ticked one of the sharpest comedy minds of the 20th century. She could lull you into a false sense of security with that adorable smile, wide eyes and, later in life, the-internet's-grandma appearance, and then hit you over the head with a cast-iron skillet — figuratively and, in the case of one *Boston Legal* episode in which she wallops a killer before chucking him in a freezer, literally. She enjoyed a remarkable final act of a remarkable career that saw her become everyone's favourite movie nonagenarian.

White never quite retired despite living to nearly 100, but credit 2009's *The Proposal* for bringing her back to prominence. The most lasting effect of the Sandra Bullock-Ryan Reynolds hit was to remind moviegoers how much they adored White as an eccentric 'gammy'. Behind-the-scenes gags showed her 'bullying' Reynolds, who later claimed she dumped him.



Top to bottom: The White stuff — with Ryan Reynolds and Sandra Bullock in 2009; Hanging with Deadpool on Reynolds' Insta account; Hosting *SNL* in 2013; Rapping on *Community* in 2010.

White later locked lips with Bradley Cooper on *SNL*, and admitted a crush on Robert Redford, who said it was mutual.

But of course he had a crush on her; who wouldn't? Betty White was a TV fixture for life. She was the first female producer of a sitcom in the 1950s, the queen of game shows in the 1960s, and a mainstay on classics such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* during the 1970s and *The Golden Girls* in the '80s and early '90s. Her Rose Lylund on the latter is one of the great comic creations — check out the

famous "herring war" scene for proof. But she was also the host of no fewer than four different programmes titled *The Betty White Show*, played a blackmailing, armed robber murderess on *Boston Legal*, and, at 88, became a regular on *Hot In Cleveland*. She matched wits with Tracy Morgan on *30 Rock*, rapped on *Community*, played a telethon-pledge-enforcer version of herself on *The Simpsons* and made a big impact as a tiger toy named 'Bitey White' in *Toy Story 4*. Some CV. She was one of our last links to TV's first golden age, and lived to brighten its current boom. She will be missed.

HELEN O'HARA

No./13 The Black List goes bonkers for biopics

Five life-story movies we want to see from the annual list of unproduced screenplays



MICHAEL BAY: THE EXPLOSIVE BIOPIC

WRITTEN BY SEAN TIDWELL

The first attempt at a Bay-opic, this screenplay telling the behind-the-scenes story of the action filmmaker claims to be "packed with enough C-4 to split an asteroid in two". Expect sunsets, swearing, and a lot of explosions.



THE COLLEGE DROPOUT

WRITTEN BY THOMAS AGUILAR, MICHAEL BALLIN

Kanye West — now known as Ye — has never had his life story told on screen. This film looks to tell the tale of his revolutionary debut album and a complicated genius (before he interrupted awards show speeches).



IDOL

WRITTEN BY TRICIA LEE

Hong Kong-born William Hung became an early viral sensation in 2004 when he appeared on *American Idol* with a hilariously bad rendering of the Ricky Martin hit 'She Bangs'. This biopic could be a fascinating insight into celebrity due to lack of talent.



BELIEVE ME

WRITTEN BY HANNAH MESCON, DREUX MORELAND

In what will likely be dismissed as fake news by the man in question, this is an "absurdist biopic" about Donald Trump — though its chronology ends in 2011, at the Correspondents' Dinner that famously inspired him to run for the White House.



SHANIA!

WRITTEN BY JESSICA WELSH

Full respect to any film bold enough to stick a screamer in the title. This aims to be the first cinematic life story of country-pop titan Shania Twain, from growing up in rural Canada to global fame and how she lost her voice. Let's hope it *does* impress us much. JOHN NUGENT

No./14

How I took on a line-up of British icons

From Siegfried Sassoon to Morrissey, **JACK LOWDEN** has become a specialist at playing real-life legends

IT USED TO bother Jack Lowden that he's often cast to play real people. Of the 12 films he's appeared in, half of them have him playing people who lived, including Tony Benn, Morrissey and the ill-fated Lord Darnley in *Mary Queen Of Scots*. "I thought it was because I'm not very interesting," Lowden says. He worried people didn't trust he had enough in himself to enrich a character. "I thought it meant they want me to play other people because they don't want *me*."

We'd suggest it's a compliment, that he's able to embody myriad people — most of whom, as he says himself, "I look nothing like." He's also excellent with fictitious roles, such as his pilot in Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*. Lowden sinks gently into real people, so they become a person of his creation, not an impression. He has Michael Fassbender to thank, in part, for this. "I was playing Tony Benn [in *A United Kingdom*] and I got obsessed with [getting Benn's voice right]," Lowden says. "Then I went to watch *Steve Jobs*. Fassbender's not making any attempt to sound or, apart from a polo neck and glasses, look like him, but I found his performance so engaging. He was first and foremost an engaging human being, not trying to play the guy. I went, 'Oh fuck,' and stopped trying to sound like Tony Benn."

Lowden's latest role sees him take on another real person — war poet Siegfried Sassoon — in *Benediction*, the latest from quietly brilliant British director Terence Davies. Sassoon was a decorated captain in World War I but found the jingoism of war appalling. He led a life of roiling sadness, having several doomed relationships with men before settling into an unhappy marriage with a woman. "The thing I kept focusing on was his regret," Lowden says.



"I always find regret more moving when it comes from a place of *not* having done anything... rather than from doing stupid things." Lowden draws a parallel with his performance as Morrissey in *England Is Mine*, another man who is "sort of frozen all the time and lives in his head."

In March, Lowden will be seen opposite Gary Oldman in *Slow Horses*, an Apple TV+ series. It's a role in which he doesn't play a real person — "The first fictitious character in a while... I didn't know what to do! Where's the blueprint? I need a blueprint!" he jokes — but one of a group of spies, from the novels by Mick Herron, who have been demoted "because they're either useless or have royally fucked up." Oldman plays the boss and Lowden is "River Cartwright, the young one that's actually very good but made an unfortunate mistake."

Clockwise from top: Keeping it real — Jack Lowden as war poet Siegfried Sassoon in *Benediction*; As Lord Darnley (with Saoirse Ronan) in *Mary Queen Of Scots*; As Morrissey (with Jessica Brown Findlay) in *England Is Mine*.

Next, Lowden wanted to play a part in which he gets to use his own voice. You'd be forgiven for having no idea he's Scottish. After a string of English-accented roles, he swore for his next part: "I'm not doing it unless it's in my own accent." However... "In March, I'm playing another real-life person. And it's another person I'm nothing like." He can't say who it is, but it's "just too cool". And the accent? "Cockney". His own fault for being so good at his job. **OLLY RICHARDS**

BENEDICTION IS IN CINEMAS FROM 13 MAY

No./15

HOME/MOVIES



WITH THE *HOME ALONE* HOUSE OPENING ITS DOORS TO AIRBNB LAST MONTH, HERE ARE FOUR OTHER MOVIE ABODES TO TRY RIGHT NOW



TONY'S CABIN FROM *AVENGERS: ENDGAME*

The lakeside retreat where Tony Stark and Pepper Potts raised a child, post-Snap — and where Tony accidentally discovers the secret of time-travelling successfully — can be found near Atlanta in Georgia.

Possible Airbnb review: "We loved it 3000."



HARRY'S BIRTHPLACE FROM *HARRY POTTER*

Harry Potter's house in Godric's Hollow can be found in the Suffolk village of Lavenham.

Expect a string of Muggles to be peering in during your stay — the owners claim this is the "second most photographed home in the UK".

Possible Airbnb review: "The crumpets were an unexpected touch!"



THE B&B FROM *GROUNDHOG DAY*

Bing! The Victorian B&B that Bill Murray's character repeatedly wakes up in can be found in Woodstock, Illinois, which doubles for Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, in the film.

Possible Airbnb review: "Will definitely stay here again."



BELLA'S HOUSE FROM *TWILIGHT*

This home in Oregon quickly became a pilgrimage point for emo teens when it was used as the home of Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart) and her father Charlie (Billy Burke).

Possible Airbnb review: "You almost expect Bella to step out, but you will have to be satisfied with a cardboard Edward watching you sleep." JOHN NUGENT



No./16

Why Denis went back to space

Get up to speed with Denis Villeneuve's post-*Dune* project: an adaptation of sci-fi novel **Rendezvous With Rama**

FRESH OFF THE success of *Dune* (and with *Dune: Part Two* en route in 2023), director Denis Villeneuve is set to bring us yet another awe-inspiring sci-fi adaptation that many have tried and failed to port over to the big screen over the years: Arthur C. Clarke's Hugo Award-winning *Rendezvous With Rama*.

Clarke's novel is a typically thrilling and thoughtful sci-fi adventure involving mankind's first interactions with a largely unknowable alien spacecraft (and the things that lurk inside). It's a trip into the cosmos we should all be excited to take, and for those unfamiliar with the material, here's what you need to know before packing your bags.

EXPECT THE LOVE CHILD OF *ARRIVAL* AND *DUNE*

Rendezvous With Rama is likely to feel a lot like the midway point between Villeneuve's *Arrival* (2016) and *Dune* (2021). Like the former, Clarke's story centres around human beings encountering and gaining entrance to a gigantic spaceship, which they explore in an effort to better understand the civilisation that constructed it. Like the latter, *Rama* is all but

guaranteed to be embued with epic scope and spectacle. In fact...

EXPECT THE SHIP TO BE THE STAR

It's very likely that Rama — the titular 50 x 20 km spaceship that serves as the story's primary location — will be the real star of this particular show. The ship's sprawling cylindrical interior is jam-packed with strange structures, alien cities, an entire ocean, and a great many mysteries besides. With Villeneuve at the helm, there's every reason to believe the visuals here will be utterly jaw-dropping.

DON'T EXPECT AN ALIENSRIFF

While the characters in *Rendezvous With Rama* do eventually encounter alien life, this is still a story from the author of *2001: A Space Odyssey* — not a feature-length, James Cameron-style firefight. There are thrills to be had, make no mistake, but audiences should anticipate something more along the lines of *Arrival*'s inquisitive alien heptapods, less so swarms of bloodthirsty Xenomorphs. **SCOTT WAMPLER**

RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA DOES NOT YET HAVE

A UK RELEASE DATE

Above:
It is rocket science! Denis Villeneuve is all set to adapt Arthur C. Clarke's classic 1973 sci-fi novel *Rendezvous With Rama*.



Clockwise from left: Kristen Bell in Netflix's upcoming *The Woman In The House...*; A scene from 1980 spoof classic *Airplane!*; Leslie Nielsen as Officer Frank Drebin in the *Naked Gun* series.



No./17

Can spoofs make a comeback?

A new Netflix show sees the return of a hitherto dormant comedy genre. Is this the start of a resurgence?

SPOOF MOVIES USED to be everywhere. In the '80s and '90s they dominated the comedy landscape (*The Naked Gun 2 1/2* and *Hot Shots!* made the box-office top ten in 1991); in the '00s the landscape became oversaturated and spoofs became a watchword for cheap knockoffs. Lately, they seem to have disappeared. But the genre looks to be making a comeback, with a new Netflix series entitled — deep breath — *The Woman In The House Across The Street From The Girl In The Window*. This new Kristen Bell-starring mini-series parodies (you guessed it) *The Girl On The Train* and *The Woman In The Window* and offers up “a darkly comedic, wine-soaked, satirical slant on the psychological thriller”, according to the official synopsis.

Now is as good a time as any for a revival of the genre, according to David Zucker and Jim Abrahams, two-thirds of the Zucker-Abrahams-Zucker team behind spoof classics such as *Airplane!* and *The Naked Gun*. “There will always be an appetite for a spoof that makes people laugh,” Zucker says. The trick, Abrahams adds, is having a good story to accompany the jokes too. “We spent 90 per

cent of the time writing the story and 10 per cent writing the jokes”, he recalls. “I think that might be a hidden secret to a successful parody. It’s not just that there’s lots of silliness, you have to pay attention to the nuts and bolts of storytelling.” (Sure enough, the showrunners of the new Netflix series have described it as “very much still a thriller”.)

But why did the genre fizzle out in the first place? According to *Not Another Teen Movie* director Joel Gallen, the genre became overloaded. “So many came out that there wasn’t really any genre left to spoof,” Gallen says. “They didn’t approach it with as much TLC as some of their predecessors

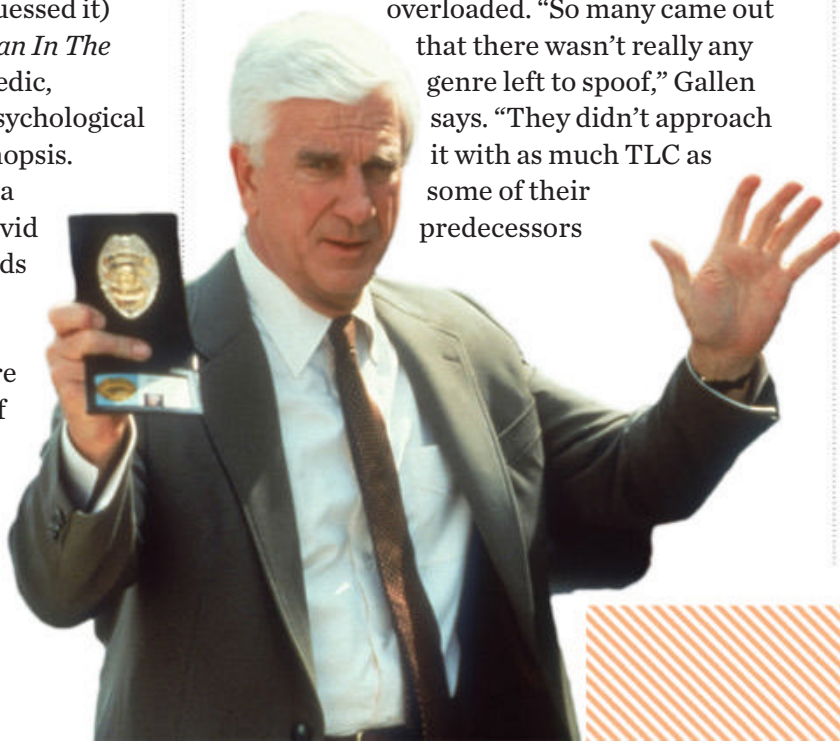
because they just sort of strung together a bunch of lowest-common-denominator jokes, which I think might have turned off some audiences.”

The rise of TikTok and YouTube was another factor, with parody moving into a near-instantaneous, bite-size space. Zucker thinks there’s room for both forms, though. “It’s a whole different format than a 30-second video,” Zucker says. “The challenge is to keep an audience in their seats for 90 minutes, and there’s still a desire for that.”

Gallen and Zucker both have new spoofs in the works, too. Gallen is developing an idea for a Christmas-themed spoof, while Zucker has teamed up with his old writing partner, Pat Croft, and Abraham’s partner from *Hot Shots!*, Mike Mannis, on a new film. “It’s an amazing film-noir script,” he reveals. “It’s an absolutely serious-appearing movie, but it’s really funny and a great story.”

How the world will receive this new wave of spoofery remains to be seen. But we may just see a return to the glory days where Frank Drebin and his bumbling ilk ruled supreme. “The truth is that the spoof was never dead,” Zucker says. “If this new Netflix series is good, people will laugh. It always comes down simply to whether or not you can make people laugh.” **ELIZABETH AUBREY**

THE WOMAN IN THE HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE GIRL IN THE WINDOW IS ON NETFLIX FROM 28 JANUARY



No./18 NEXT IN THE SERIES

You fell in love with that incredible new TV show. And then it ended! Don't despair — **Boyd Hilton recommends the sibling shows to watch next**

IF YOU LOVED... THE TOURIST



THE FALL

(BRITBOX/NETFLIX)

Before he was mysteriously stalked by a gigantic truck in *The Tourist* (and negotiated

his way through three *Fifty Shades* films, dignity still intact), Jamie Dornan played serial killer Paul Spector in three series of audacious BBC drama *The Fall*. The character of Spector was designed to show that murderous psychopaths don't necessarily conform to any particular stereotype. Dornan's calm, handsome family-man exterior concealed his fetishistic stalking of women, and together with Gillian Anderson, as uncompromising detective Stella Gibson, helped turn *The Fall* into an intense viewing experience.

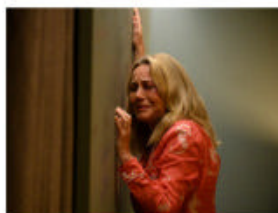


RELLIK

(AMAZON PRIME VIDEO)

Sibling writing/producing team Harry and Jack Williams are a mini-industry creating

TV thrillers from *The Missing* to *The Tourist*. One of their most intriguing, if lesser-known, projects is *Rellik*, which aired in 2017 on BBC One at the same time as their series *Liar* was on ITV. The title ("killer" spelled backwards) reflects the show's device of telling the story in reverse. It opens with a serial killer being caught, then the crimes being committed and the search for the perpetrator by detective Gabriel Markham (Richard Dormer). *Liar* was the bigger hit, but *Rellik* is a fascinatingly weird curio.



CLOSE TO ME

(ALL 4)

The Tourist is the latest in a long line of TV dramas featuring protagonists suffering

amnesia. One recent and oddly overlooked

example is *Close To Me*, in which Connie Nielsen plays interpreter Jo Harding, who's suffered a head trauma and can't remember what happened over the previous 12 months. The six-parter teases the possibility that Jo is the real villain, while deploying Christopher Eccleston at his creepiest as her deeply ambiguous husband.



THE CRY

(BRITBOX)

The Australian Outback setting of *The Tourist* is perfect for its existential thriller atmosphere,

giving Jamie Dornan's lead character nowhere to hide. Similarly effective in its use of landscape is 2018 BBC series *The Cry*, in which Jenna Coleman plays a teacher whose baby disappears while she's visiting Australia with her fiancé (Ewen Leslie). Adapted from the novel by Helen FitzGerald, the show jumps around between myriad timelines to powerfully disorientating effect, and Coleman is the personification of traumatised turmoil.

THE TOURIST IS AVAILABLE NOW ON BBC iPLAYER

No./19 Walking off into the sunset

As *The Walking Dead*'s final stint gears up, we look back at the best — and worst — moments from the ultimate zombie TV show

DEAD GOOD

NO GUTS NO GLORY

(SEASON 1, EPISODE 1)

The image of Glen and Rick's bloody walk amongst the dead remains one of the show's most iconic. Draped in entrails to disguise their scent, the two venture out into a sea of grasping walkers, exchanging increasingly panicked glances with every step. Almost unbearably tense.

HEADS YOU LOSE

(SEASON 9, EPISODE 15)

"Oof" is the only word to describe this. After a run-in with crazed Whisperer Alpha, Carol, Michonne and Daryl are presented with this spectacularly harsh rebuke. The Whisperer has marked her territory with a row of sharpened stakes... bearing the severed heads of several major characters!

PLAIN ROTTEN

HERSHEL'S FARM

(THE WHOLE OF SEASON 2)

Season 1's excitement was followed by a 13-episode agricultural interlude, in which the survivors hang out on a farm and do wildly mundane things like clean out a well. There are stand-out moments (Shane! Sophia!), but no-one watching shed a tear when the farm went up in flames.

BATTER UP

(SEASON 7, EPISODE 1)

We waited a year to find out who Negan bludgeoned to death. But when the moment came, it was a step too far, offing two characters in an act of sadistic violence that bordered on obscene.

JAMES DYER

THE WALKING DEAD IS ON STAR ON DISNEY+ FROM 21 FEBRUARY



The Northman

Unfiltered, uncensored, uncompromising trailer reactions from team **EMPIRE**

Ben Travis (Deputy Online Editor): This is a big step up for Robert Eggers. The scale of it looks so much bigger than *The Witch* and *The Lighthouse*. The studio's trying to sell it as a mainstream film, but that's not his sensibility. He's going to make it feel gritty and grounded but also mythical, like with everything else that he's done.

James Dyer (Digital Editor-In-Chief): I'm very here for Eric Northman from *True Blood* playing a Northman.

Ben: Maybe it's gonna go full *From Dusk Till Dawn* halfway through; it becomes the vampire movie that you weren't expecting.

Beth Webb (News Editor): Nicole Kidman's wig has garnered its own fanbase on the internet, which is pretty nice.

James: She looks very Galadriel here.

Ben: Did she wander straight off the set of *Nine Perfect Strangers* and just rejig the wig and slightly change her accent?

Sophie Butcher (Social Media Editor): Didn't she play Alexander Skarsgård's wife in *Big Little Lies*, and now she's playing his mother? And he says, "Avenge my father, save my mother," in the trailer. So is Nicole Kidman still playing her later in the film?

Joanna Moran (Photography Director): If this is indeed loosely based on *Hamlet*, she marries hot stuff Claes Bang, who plays his uncle.

James: He brings the clash bang, she brings the wallop.

John Nugent (Reviews Editor): Ethan Hawke looking amazing here.

Beth: Straight-up stunner.

Ben: He's getting absolutely Boromir-d here: he gets shot by a massive arrow but keeps swinging his sword anyway.

John: I think they give quite a lot of the plot away in this trailer, which is a shame.

Chris Lupton (Creative Director): I'm of the mind that this isn't what we think it is. I think there's more to it than just a bunch of Vikings killing each other.

John: It's gonna be freaky as fuck.

James: I like that it's co-written by someone called Sjó, who I think is an Icelandic poet.

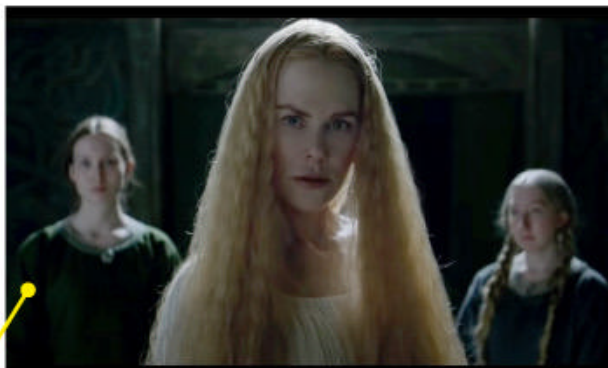
Joanna: His full name is Sigurjón Birgir Sigurðsson, but he shortened it to Sjó.

Alex Godfrey (Features Editor): Just one name, like Madonna.

Chris: This would 100 per cent be a better movie if Madonna was in it.

James: It's evens and odds whether or not Björk's actually in costume or just her Sunday clothes.

John: I've seen Björk live and she wears this sort of stuff all the time.



Joanna: It's just her Met Gala outfit.

John: It would be more shocking if she was wearing a demure pantsuit.

Ben: I wonder what the cool animal character in this film is going to be. There was Black Phillip the goat in *The Witch* and the seagulls in *The Lighthouse*...

Joanna: I was just looking on IMDb and thought it said there was a beaver in the film, but it actually says "standard bearer".

Alex: I can't wait to see this film. Every shot excites me.

James: I could rock that hat.

Alex: I don't think that you could.

James: I think it would fit my aesthetic quite well.

Joanna: Chris has just come back to the Trailer Talk video chat wearing a furry wolf hat.

Chris: It's made of the beards of past boyfriends.

James: That's Big Dick Energy right there.

Alex: That's some mad Fatima Whitbread javelin shit.

Ben: It's like the shot in *Hawkeye* where Jeremy Renner catches the Molotov cocktail and chucks it back. Every action film has to include somebody catching a weapon that was thrown at them and immediately chucking it back because it's fucking sick.

John: Can we acknowledge Skarsgård's abs while we're here? He seems to have a ten-pack.

Alex: Can it just be noted that Beth put her specs on in order to examine the ten-pack?

John: That's like an Austin Powers move.

Beth: It's a very dark screen and I just want to be accurate. I take my job very seriously.

Mike Cathro (Deputy Art Director): This looks like one of those *Loki* variants to me.

Sophie: This has a real abstract surrealness to it. I think this is a glimpse of when it gets really trippy.

Joanna: It looks like a perfume ad.

Ben: I think there will be scenes in this film that are really out-there, where the level of reality is up to the viewer. This feels like a signature move of Eggers at this point, if you think about *The Lighthouse* with the mermaid dreams, and *The Witch* had a real level of ambiguity to the supernatural stuff that it had going on.

Alex: I hope this does really well, it looks fucking amazing. I can't think of a film that I'm looking forward to more this year.

THE NORTHMAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 22 APRIL



INTRODUCING...

Mike Faist

THE 29-YEAR-OLD
ACTOR MAKES A BUZZY
BREAKTHROUGH AS RIFF
IN STEVEN SPIELBERG'S
WEST SIDE STORY

ON WORKING WITH SPIELBERG

"I really was nervous about it, because I had just come off this indie movie — and then I was thinking it was going to be a big Hollywood thing, and Steven was going to be a dictator and tell you what to do, where to stand... And it was totally the opposite. He was a master collaborator. It was a joyful experience."

ON THE AUDITION PROCESS

"It was over the course of a year. It starts and stops. I put in a tape in February 2018, and that November they asked if I would come in and dance — which I was very reluctant to do. I literally asked my agent, 'Do I have to dance, though?' To which I believe they said: 'This is *West Side Story*!'" [laughs]

ON WRITING A SCREENPLAY

"I finished a script last March. It's a dark comedy; it's a love story. It's basically about love and loss and the choice to choose to love even though we know in some way that we will lose the people that we love."

ON A WHIRLWIND *WEST SIDE STORY* EXPERIENCE

"It's been super-fun having the movie come out. It's weird because we shot the movie three years ago. [The premiere] was a gearshift for a second — you're on top of the Roosevelt Hotel with Steven and, oh, I don't know, Vin Diesel. You're like, 'What's going on?!'"

JOHN NUGENT

WEST SIDE STORY IS IN CINEMAS NOW



No. 20

Inside the beekeeper drama generating major buzz

How **Hive**, the Sundance hit about a Balkan war widow who starts her own business, is now gunning for Oscars glory

IN THE FIVE-DECADE history of the Sundance Film Festival, no film has won all three main awards (the Grand Jury Prize, the Audience Award and the Directing Award). Until last year, that is, when *Hive*, a low-budget arthouse film about a war widow who starts her own business selling honey and 'ajvar' (a spicy Balkan spread) in the aftermath of the Kosovo War, swept the board. For Kosovan debut filmmaker Blerta Basholli, it was fairly stunning.

"We're a small country," says Basholli. "We don't produce a lot of films. It's really hard as an artist to make it out of here, so we really didn't expect a lot. I'm usually the sceptical one. And then we got the prizes... it was really surreal and amazing. Most of all, of course, we were happy because it gave attention to the film."

It's an unlikely victory from humble beginnings that echoes the journey of the film's story, which is based on real-life beekeeper Fahrije Hoti (played in the film by Yllka Gashi), a woman widowed by war who defies her highly traditional patriarchal community — where a woman even getting a driving licence is considered shocking to the men — to become a self-made entrepreneur.

Basholli first encountered Hoti's story on the news — but her initial instinct was to make a comedy. "There was an era where Balkan films were satirical about very serious matters,"

she explains. "But when I met Fahrije, the film became about her. I was like, 'This is a really strong character sitting in front of me.' So I thought I should portray that on screen and make it documentary-style — because it's a real person. It's a very empowering story."

It's also a story that's earned global recognition since that Sundance hat-trick — and has now made the shortlist for Best International Film at this year's Oscars. Basholli hopes to take the real Hoti with her to the awards show. "I would love to," she says. "[Hoti] has been with us at festivals, she was with us in DC when we had an event with Dua Lipa and the president of Kosovo. I think she deserves to go to the ceremony." An Academy Award, then, would be the sweetest win of all. **JOHN NUGENT**

HIVE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 11 MARCH



Above: Yllka Gashi as Fahrije Hoti in *Hive*.
Below: Sweet as... Blerta Basholli's debut feature is being touted as a possible Oscar-winner.

PINT
OF
MILKPATRICK
WILSON**What is the worst smell in the world?**

You're talking to a guy that spends a good portion of the week cleaning up dog shit in his yard. But I'm sort of immune to that now. Vomit in a dirty bar bathroom, perhaps? I'll hurl just thinking about it.

What one thing do you do better than anyone else you know?

Oh, man. Well, of my friends that aren't in the industry — meaning my Jersey friends — I would say karaoke. But I can't say that in the company of my Broadway friends.

Do you have a nickname?

Paddy is the most common. My closest friends call me Paddy. When I was a kid, I had some family members call me 'Pack'. Definitely *not* Pat. I'm so not a Pat. Anytime I'm called Pat, I feel like they're talking to someone else. Usually the drummer from Weezer.

Do you have a signature dish?

I would say two things. I do a cedar-plank salmon with a homemade rub on a charcoal grill. That's usually a fan-favourite. And then every New Year's Day, I make pizzas outside, no matter what the weather is. Which can be difficult in New Jersey on January 1, but we go for it. I have an outdoor pizza oven; in the winter the thing takes about five hours to light, and about 30 seconds to make a pizza. We normally have a lot of people stay over and it's a good way for some of the adults to sop up the alcohol.

What character were you in your first school play?

Well, not to sound like a complete jerk, but I think the first play that I did was a professional play. It was *A Christmas Carol*. I was Tiny Tim. It was at the St. Louis Repertory Theatre in 1981. I was eight. That was my first play. I remember the [adopts mockney accent] "God bless us, everyone!" line.



ILLUSTRATION ARNO

How much is a pint of milk?

Do they even sell it in pints? [Laughs] Let's play *The Price Is Right* here. I do a lot of shopping in gallons. If you're looking at \$4.60, \$4.70 for a gallon, half a gallon would be... [makes maths noises] I'm gonna say a dollar. A pint of milk should be a dollar. I'm doing my elementary conversions.

Have you ever knowingly broken the law?

Oh, I'm sure. Absolutely. My son and I keep having this joke — when I ask him to jaywalk, he's like, "No, Dad, we'll get arrested!" I'm like, "I know and we'll go to prison! We'll be kicked out of the country!" But what have I knowingly done?

I mean, nothing really. Some minor vandalism in high school. Speeding. I stole a candy bar. Shockingly, I drank underage. But nothing tragic.

What's the worst thing you've ever put in your mouth?

[Laughs] That's ridiculous. It's probably back to dog shit. I'm sure, in my quest to clean up dog crap, that I have licked the bag to open the bag, and then it's on my hand, and I have dog shit in there too. It is what it is!

Do you have any scars?

I do, yeah. My most glaring is on my hand from my dog, when she was a puppy, and scratched the crap out of my hands in the dead of winter. I still have a three-inch scar from that. My oldest scar is from when I had a hernia, when I was a kid. I was about two-and-a-half or three. That's a good one.

Which movie have you seen the most?

Fletch. I mean, you know, the knee-jerk reaction is *Star Wars*. But I think that *Fletch*, top-to-bottom, I've probably seen more than anything else.

On a scale of one to ten, how hairy is your arse?

Zero. And that's by genetics, not by razor. I don't know if people even do that. I've never had that. By the way, there's about five movies to prove that! Anybody who has seen *Watchmen* or *Angels In America* knows. I can't really lie about it. It's all on camera. JOHN NUGENT

COMING SOON

AQUAMAN AND THE LOST KINGDOM
(2022)

Wilson will return to again play Orm Marius, half-brother of Aquaman. Director James Wan revealed a heavily bearded new look for the character on Instagram, Orm "doing his Cast Away impression".

INSIDIOUS: THE DARK REALM (TBC)

Filming is about to start on the fifth film in the long-running horror series. Wilson will make his directorial debut, as well as reprising the role of Josh Lambert, a father whose son is connected to the spirit world.

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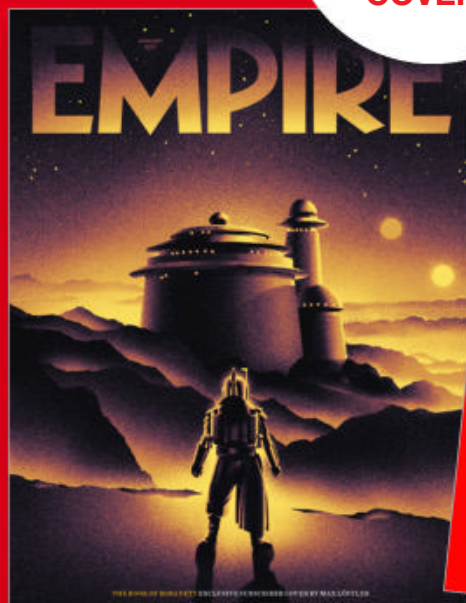
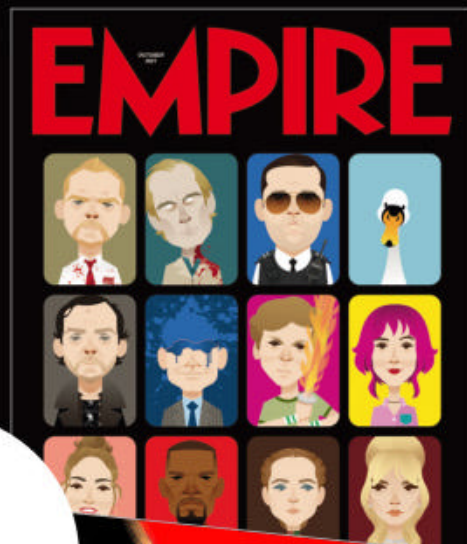
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[EDITED BY IAN FREER]

[FILM]

NIGHTMARE ALLEY

★★★★★

OUT 21 JANUARY
CERT TBC / 139 MINS

DIRECTOR Guillermo del Toro
CAST Bradley Cooper, Rooney Mara, Cate Blanchett, Toni Collette, Willem Dafoe, Ron Perlman

PLOT Charismatic drifter Stanton Carlisle (Cooper) sets fire to his old life and joins a carnival where he learns the secrets of mentalism, witnesses horrifying 'geek' shows, and falls for fellow carny Molly (Mara). But when he later hatches a plot with sultry psychiatrist Dr Lilith Ritter (Blanchett), his manipulative abilities are pushed to the brink.



FOR GUILLERMO DEL TORO fans who have followed the monster-obsessed auteur through decades of delicately drawn fantasy-horror fables (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Devil's Backbone*) and splashy sci-fi blockbusters (*Pacific Rim*, the *Hellboy* movies), the prospect of the filmmaker eschewing the supernatural in *Nightmare Alley* might feel somewhat disappointing. After his Oscar-sweeping *The Shape Of Water* (13 nominations and four wins, including Best Picture and Best Director), could the man who gave us face-sucking mutant vampires, red-clay ghouls and cinema's most sensuous fish-man really be betraying genre fare in favour of more typically awards-worthy material?

Fear not. *Nightmare Alley* doesn't feature things that go bump in the night, but del Toro hasn't gone soft. Case in point: mere minutes into his tale of mind-manipulation and moral decline, a man gruesomely bites the head off



Clockwise from left: Fairground attraction; Bradley Cooper as the charming Stanton Carlisle; Psychiatrist Dr Liliith Ritter (Cate Blanchett) with Rooney Mara's Molly; Willem Dafoe plays carnival barker Clem Hoately.



a live chicken, its legs kicking helplessly as blood spews. This, Bradley Cooper's Stanton 'Stan' Carlisle learns, is a 'geek show' — an illegal but lucrative carnival attraction in which a desperate, demoralised drunk commits disgusting deeds for a baying crowd. Is the geek, asks Willem Dafoe's ringleader, "man or beast?" It's a dichotomy that runs through del Toro's adaptation of William Lindsay Gresham's novel (which spawned an equally pitch-black 1947 cinematic iteration), and a question that hangs over Stan's head as he charts his own course into the heart of darkness and beyond.

Even with both feet planted in the real world (late '30s/early '40s America), del Toro conjures a dreamlike — or, nightmare-like — atmosphere right away, as Stan falls asleep on a bus, leaving the blazing ruins of his past life in the rear-view mirror, and awakens at the carnival where he'll reinvent himself. It's here that the first half of the bisected narrative unfolds,

Stan picking up odd jobs and learning the tricks of the trade — swindling punters with the 'clairvoyant' Zeena (the ever-brilliant Toni Collette), sparking a romance with Molly (Rooney Mara) as he dials up the drama in her electrifying act, all while developing his own talent for deception. Learning the secrets behind the shows is compelling, as are the characters among the troupe — notably gruff strongman Bruno (del Toro lucky charm Ron Perlman), cruel geek-breaker Clem (Dafoe), and Zeena's melancholic, alcoholic partner Pete (David Strathairn).

Ultimately, though, the carnival is all set-up for the second half, as Stan runs away to the city with Molly to reinvent himself once more as 'The Great Stanton'. Together the pair dazzle unsuspecting audiences with their mentalism show, until psychiatrist Dr Liliith Ritter (a note-perfect Cate Blanchett) clocks their game and draws Stan into her own highwire act. The gear-shift is a welcome one — when Blanchett

enters the fray the stakes crank up, her character proving more than a match for the increasingly over-confident Stan. Scenes in which the pair prowls around each other — probing each other's psyches in power-shifting tugs of war, scheming to swindle the rich and powerful Ezra Grindle (Richard Jenkins) — are the film's undisputed highlight.

For all that *Nightmare Alley* is deeply cinematic — beautifully lit, with impeccable production design in both carnival and city, captured in striking frames and long-held shots by cinematographer Dan Laustsen — the two-part structure feels almost novelistic. Instead of a clearly defined narrative drive, Cooper's character is the narrative through-line, and there's a slow-burn atmosphere and depth of detail that, like *Crimson Peak*, feels rich with subtext, almost playing out in chapters. Another filmmaker might have intercut the timelines to up the pace, but del Toro plays it confidently linear, letting the story sprawl before the audience. As a result, you often don't know exactly where it's going — perhaps a patience-tester given the runtime — but it feels all the richer come the final reel. Eventually, Guillermo goes full del-gore-o, smashing faces as the plot barrels towards a bloody conclusion.

While Mara is left with the less interesting role (particularly once Blanchett enters play), Cooper is outstanding across every stage of Carlisle's journey — displaying warmth among the magnetism, even as his lust for power takes darker turns. His final sequence here is astonishing.

As a dark carnival of exploitation, *Nightmare Alley* isn't really del Toro forsaking genre, after all. In here there's a paranoid noir, a psychological thriller, a rise-and-fall grifter tale — often playing like a ghoulish, gothic *The Great Gatsby*. For a prestige picture, it boasts surprisingly frequent close-ups of a three-eyed pickled foetus called Enoch. No monsters, then, but beastliness aplenty. In other words, it's right up Guillermo del Toro's alley. **BEN TRAVIS**

VERDICT A rare del Toro film that's not an outright spook show, *Nightmare Alley* isn't quite the filmmaker's best — but it's not far off, boasting an enveloping atmosphere, compelling characters, and gorgeous filmmaking.



[FILM]

SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME



OUT NOW
CERT 12A / 148 MINS

DIRECTOR Jon Watts

CAST Tom Holland, Zendaya, Benedict Cumberbatch, Jacob Batalon, Marisa Tomei, Alfred Molina, Willem Dafoe, Jamie Foxx

PLOT After being outed as Spider-Man thanks to Mysterio (Jake Gyllenhaal), Peter Parker (Holland) seeks an extreme solution to regain his privacy: get Doctor Strange (Cumberbatch) to magically bend reality so that nobody ever knew. However, when the spell goes wrong, the resulting multiversal mishap imports some of Spider-Man's most sinister enemies from other universes...

LET'S GO BACK for a moment to a scene in *Spider-Man: Far From Home*. No, not the one where J. Jonah Jameson appears in the very welcome form of J.K. Simmons. (Though that is obviously relevant.) But the scene where Mysterio (Jake Gyllenhaal) talks about there being

a multiverse, spinning a story about being a hero from another dimension. It was a tease, of course (Mysterio was bullshitting), but while it gave a sneaky wink to the spectacularly animated *Into The Spider-Verse*, it also deliberately sowed a seed.

One which sprouted to entertaining effect in the recent *Loki* TV series, before finally realising its full (Marvel) cinematic (Universe) potential here, in *Far From Home*'s much-hyped and rumour-laden sequel. Whether you've figured out what's coming, or are taken totally by surprise by some of its, er, surprises, we're happy to report that the result is crowd-pleasing in all the best possible ways.

As you'll know from the trailers, thanks to a spell-gone-sideways, *No Way Home* brings back almost all the villains from the pre-MCU movies. Which, with the help of Marvel's de-ageing magic, solves the problem of how a new film would cast better than Willem Dafoe as *Spider-Man*'s Green Goblin (who wisely ditches the *Power Rangers* mask early on), or the mighty Alfred Molina as *Spider-Man 2*'s Doctor Octopus. But, in keeping with the previous Jon Watts films, the joy of seeing them all returned is less felt in the action sequences — which occasionally become crowded and confusing with all the lightning and sand and pumpkin bombs — than it is in the sparky, snappy dialogue. At one point, it's almost like an above-average *SNL* sketch: Spidey's various foes all gathering together to snipe and compare notes.

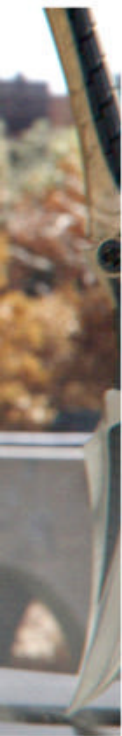


Above: Three's a crowd? Visitors from an alternate reality Electro (Jamie Foxx), Sandman (Thomas Haden Church) and Lizard (Rhys Ifans).

However, there is far more to the movie than wittily executed fan service. While it piles the villainy and jeopardy high, it doesn't neglect the series' heart: Tom Holland's Peter, and his ongoing struggle to do the right thing by his friends and family, even though doing so invariably seems to make things worse. Holland has never been more affecting in the role, or guided Peter through such a battering, as the poor kid ping-pongs between finding solutions and creating problems — much to the annoyance of Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch), who



Left: Tom Holland returns as Spider-Man. **Here:** The Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe).



doesn't so much step into Tony Stark's mentor shoes as play the exasperated foil. There are serious consequences, too. This isn't just a light-hearted knockabout. *No Way Home* has a massive emotional blow to deliver.

Crucially, this is a story about second chances. After Mysterio's parting revelation, Peter, MJ (Zendaya), Ned (Jacob Batalon) and May's (Marisa Tomei) lives are turned into a news-feed nightmare, and sweet Peter's efforts to fix that pop open the aforementioned can of baddie worms. It's here that the theme of second chances gets *really* interesting. Why should only our hero have a second chance? Why not also, Peter reasons, all these damaged "multiversal trespassers", driven to criminality by manufactured schizophrenia, errant mutagens, or crossed nanowires?

Just below the surface, the idea is nudged a little further. With the dimensional doors opened to the older movies, the films themselves are almost given a second chance, too; an opportunity to do-over, or at least address, some of their plotting missteps.

No Way Home is, if you step back and think about it, a bloody weird and audacious movie. Yet as crazy-meta as the narrative gets, it always keeps its characters up front, with some dynamic and, at times, truly heart-warming interplay between the established players and their interdimensional guests.

Sure, the climactic showdown on the Statue Of Liberty feels very familiar (*X-Men*, anyone?), but it also serves up at least one punch-the-air moment that will have audiences whooping like they did when Thor rocked up at Wakanda in *Infinity War*; or Cap caught Mjolnir in *Endgame*. Indeed, *No Way Home* is the closest the MCU has come to the heights of those two films since Tony Stark Snapped Thanos away. And for all its epic heft, it somehow stays neighbourhood and friendly. Which also helps make it, in a very real sense, the ultimate *Spider-Man* movie. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT A monumentally successful Spider-instalment which pulls off a tricky and ambitious narrative trick with all the grace of a balcony-top backflip. At the risk of getting cheesy, it won't just make you cheer — it'll make you want to hug your friends, too.



She'd always been a fan of florals.

[FILM]

BELLE



OUT 4 FEBRUARY
CERT TBC / 127 MINS

DIRECTOR Mamoru Hosoda

CAST (VOICES) Kaho Nakamura, Takeru Satoh, Kōji Yakusho

PLOT Troubled teen Suzu (Nakamura) struggles to express herself among her peers, and embraces the online virtual reality of 'U'. There, she becomes 'Bell', a pop star and immediate viral sensation. One day she runs into the mysterious 'Beast', and finds herself drawn to this reclusive outcast.

THOUGH CENTRED ON a teenager seemingly content to fade into the background amongst her peers, *Belle* itself is hardly lacking in ambition. It's at once an homage to *Beauty And The Beast*, and a recollection of its creator's greatest hits (*Wolf Children*, *The Boy And The Beast*, *Mirai*); a large-scale fantasy as well as a small-town coming-of-age drama, reflecting on the intertwining of teen anxiety and social media; an innovative piece of CG animation that blends with a more traditionally hand-drawn style. But it's never overwhelming, as director Mamoru Hosoda arranges all these moving parts into a precise, exciting symphony.

Through his protagonist Suzu's (Kaho Nakamura) story, Hosoda remixes *Beauty And The Beast* not just as a reflection on how teenagers can escape into internet communities but also on the broader subject of the role of the parent, and the pain that results when they are absent. Taking on the persona of 'Bell', Suzu, who has a fraught relationship with her father (Kōji Yakusho), becomes something of a halfway point between a V-tuber (an online entertainer who uses an avatar) and a pop star, her singing turning her into a viral sensation. Where other films might warn against

the perils of this, *Belle* instead takes a humanist view of the internet, seeing it as a medium through which isolated and misunderstood souls connect. Not that the film ignores the risks — as Suzu encounters 'The Beast' (Takeru Satoh), it engages with the practice of doxxing (a cyber-attack that reveals a user's true identity), and how corporate control of online spaces corrupts communities.

As with much of Hosoda's work, *Belle* constantly has one foot in and one out of reality, the setting split between the real and digital worlds, the characters animated with traditional 2D in the former and CGI in the latter. In 2D, they appear more subdued and naturalistic, but very often offer outsized, cartoonish reactions. In 3D, the characters take on a fairy-tale appearance, while the world of 'U' itself appears as somewhere between a sprawling cityscape, a circuit board and a harp. There's a constant push-and-pull throughout, between the 2D and 3D animation, the inner self and the external, it all feeding back into how the online space essentially doubles us, offering the chance to create a new image for oneself. That conceptual approach to the animation makes switching between the two worlds feel seamless.

With its intense story, spectacular animation and catchy soundtrack, there's an almost dizzying amount going on. But Hosoda keeps it all on an even keel, employing recurring visual motifs, a precise rhythm and quieter, slice-of-life vignettes in the real world as room to breathe. It stumbles occasionally: while the nature of Bell and The Beast's relationship aligns with Hosoda's sensibilities perfectly on paper, the revelation of the latter's identity feels clumsily executed. Still, the conclusion to which it leads is powerful, balancing its lavish fantasy imagery with moments of quiet observation and moving intimacy. **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL**

VERDICT *Belle* is an exhilarating transformation of a classic tale, updating a story of alienation into something deeply resonant with our digital way of life. Though it misses a couple of notes in its final act, it's an exhilarating sensory experience, with great emotional depths.



[FILM]

MASS



OUT 21 JANUARY (CINEMAS/
SKY CINEMA)
CERT TBC / 111 MINS

DIRECTOR Fran Kranz**CAST** Jason Isaacs, Martha Plimpton, Ann Dowd, Reed Birney

PLOT Years after a tragic school shooting, Jay (Isaacs) and Gail (Plimpton) — the parents of one of the victims — meet face-to-face with Richard (Birney) and Linda (Dowd), the mother and father of the perpetrator. Gathered in an Episcopalian church's antechamber, they reckon with their pain and try to find peace.

FROM FIRST-TIME writer-director Fran Kranz (yes, he of *The Cabin In The Woods* stoner-guy fame), *Mass* is an impressive four-actor chamber-piece that combines the relentless emotional intensity of theatre with a voyeuristic intimacy that's specific to film. The result, a potent study in tension and release, offers an arresting examination of grief that suggests the only way to come to terms with the unspeakable

is to talk through it.

Kranz's film opens with Judy (Breeda Wool), a parishioner at a small Idahoan Episcopal church, fretfully setting up a meeting room in its antechamber with young helper Anthony (Kagen Albright). The arrival of coordinator Kendra (Michelle N. Carter) reveals two families will be attending, while her assessment of the venue's suitability allows Kranz to deftly set the tone and define the space for the discussion that's ahead. A playroom door is quietly closed; a stained-glass school project draws a protracted, "Ohh..."; four chairs at a table are quickly split into two pairs; a tissue box's placement is scrutinised enough to suggest its necessity is inevitable. In these early moments, the stillness of cinematographer Ryan Jackson-Healy's camera is striking — it's as if everyone, including us, is holding their breath.

Before long, Jay (Jason Isaacs) and Gail (Martha Plimpton) arrive, followed by Linda (Ann Dowd) and Richard (Reed Birney). The tension between the families is palpable, augmented by Kranz and his ensemble's nuanced orchestration of uncomfortable small talk, abyssal silences, and character-revealing gestures. Linda extends an olive branch with the gifting of a potted plant, and in return Gail wars with her empathetic impulses as she passive-aggressively offers tissues when Linda later starts crying. Richard tries to pitch himself as the diplomatic voice of reason, deploying wishy-washy double-negatives like, "I don't



disagree," with alacrity in increasingly vain attempts to diffuse tension. Jay, meanwhile, continually has to keep himself in check with reminders of his therapist's guidance.

Yang Hua Hu's punchy editing makes an eruption feel inevitable, destabilising Jackson-Healy's static camerawork with increasingly frenetic cuts between loaded lines and expectant glares as the elephant in the room becomes

Top to bottom: Four parents, two perspectives, one terrible tragedy; Jay (Jason Isaacs) and Gail (Martha Plimpton), struggling to make sense of appalling loss; Gail with fellow grief-stricken mum Linda (Ann Dowd).

unavoidable entirely. Thirty-seven minutes into the film, having implicitly established that both families have lost a child in a school shooting, Gail bursts *Mass'* emotional dam — “Why do I want to know about your son? Because he killed mine.”

A lesser film might seek to embellish or sensationalise this revelation with a flashback, but Kranz commits to staying in the room with these same-but-differently traumatised parents for the 20 seconds of devastating silence that follow, and the hour of soul-searching that lays beyond that. Through the baring of all their rage, anguish, heartache and hollowness following the shooting (no punches are pulled, so proceed with caution), Kranz makes a clear point about the futility of trying to assign and deflect blame retrospectively. Instead, the filmmaker is more interested in pursuing restorative justice in the here and now, looking for something tangible his characters can reach, as painful as that process may be.

Kranz's sensitive directorial approach and the insular setting create a safe space for this exercise, but it falls on the shoulders of the film's four powerful leads to guide us through it. Jason Isaacs' sullen-eyed and jaw-clenching performance as Jay, whose relentless activism and instinctual need to be strong for his wife is visibly crippling him, might well be his finest film work to date. Beside him, Martha Plimpton delicately handles her portrayal of a mother who yearns for release from her pain while fearing her son will be lost for good if she finds it. Opposite them, Reed Birney and Ann Dowd convey the torture of loving and grieving a murderer with tact and boundless empathy, their vulnerability — there from the start in Dowd's empath Linda and gradually exposed in Birney's more mannered Richard — opening the door to reconciliation. As the two families crest the waves of anger and argumentation, an aspect-ratio shift drives home the magnitude of the way their world has changed, the stagedness of their meeting dissolving as they move past the table, chairs, legal waivers and hypotheticals towards something approaching mercy.

By the time Jay and Gail, Linda and Richard go their separate ways, it feels as though they are leaving somehow lighter, certainly changed. And though the sheer heft and relentlessness of it all may be too much for some, *Mass'* moving story of hope, humanity and forgiveness found in the face of unimaginable tragedy lingers long after the fade to black. **JORDAN KING**

VERDICT It may be a tough watch, but, boasting a quartet of excellent performances, Fran Kranz's directorial debut is a technically adept, emotionally exhausting yet deeply cathartic film that couldn't be more timely.

The refugees en route to, hopefully, a new beginning.



[FILM]

FLEE



OUT 11 FEBRUARY
CERT TBC / 90 MINS

DIRECTOR Jonas Poher Rasmussen

CAST (VOICES) Daniel Karimyar, Fardin Mijdzadeh, Milad Eskandari, Belal Faiz

PLOT After years of keeping it private, gay Afghan Amin (Daniel Karimyar, Fardin Mijdzadeh), living in Denmark, shares his story of migration, an exodus from repressive Kabul through Russia and Estonia.

REFUGEE STORIES HAVE a tragic, crushing universality about them: dank cargo-holds and shipping containers, thuggish human traffickers, the desperation of families torn apart by war and persecution. But in the telling of one such story — that of Amin Nawabi (Daniel Karimyar, Fardin Mijdzadeh), an Afghan academic settled in Denmark but still shaken by the escape he made during his teenage years — documentary filmmaker Jonas Poher Rasmussen has somehow found a way inside these horrors that's truly unique. *Flee* jolts to life via swirling hand-drawn animation, which is not what you'd expect. It's also a memory play, a therapy session and, most subtly, a coming-out comedy. Unspooling like a hush of secrets about to be disclosed after decades, *Flee* is a stirring, haunted reminiscence like no other.

Amin, by the way, isn't his real name. That's been changed, along with his facial features, to protect him from a vengeance that will become clear. While non-kiddie animations like *Waltz With Bashir* and Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* may come to mind, *Flee* shares a deeper kinship with David France's recent deepfake-assisted *Welcome To Chechnya*, another refugee documentary that uses unconventional methods to pursue an activist truth. Rasmussen, a Danish school friend

of Amin who convinced him to finally unburden his past, transforms his subject's words into vibrantly styled episodes, some euphoric: Amin's blissed-out boyhood in Kabul — running wild in neon-pink headphones and his sister's dress — is scored to A-ha's "Take On Me", the film's pencil-sketch-style animation popping its collar with the same dynamic brio of Steve Barron's classic video.

But with the rise of the Mujahideen, a sweat-soaked rootlessness takes hold, compelling his family to take flight to a depressing post-Soviet-era apartment in Moscow. It gets worse from there. As Amin's tale grows darker and more unsparing, *Flee's* animation keeps step for step with him: a nightmarish forest border-crossing takes on a windy, inky, blurred kineticism that's pure panic (a bit like when Frodo puts on his ring). The decisions made by escaping families during these moments are heartbreaking, yet they don't have time to slow down and think. Evoking this tension, Uno Helmersson's orchestral score makes room for a keening violin solo, struggling for balance above the fray. The player is Mari Samuelsen, who seems to understand the film on a deep level.

Meanwhile, a gay identity is busy being forged. Young Amin gazes longingly at Jean-Claude Van Damme on a poster for *Bloodsport*, and it's just the laugh we need. Later, a final, climactic plane-ride with another teenage boy has the charge of a secret date. Rasmussen has the confidence to crosscut his re-creations with scenes of the grown-up Amin, comfortably out and house-hunting with his boyfriend Kasper but detached from their quest for a home. Can stability be as easy as making a down payment? Never for Amin, and *Flee*, in its refusal to simplify his trauma or turn it into something purely triumphant, is the complex heartbreaker our current immigration crisis demands. **JOSHUA ROTHKOPF**

VERDICT An extraordinary blend of personal reflection and inspired craft, *Flee* is a harrowing child's-eye adventure that lends lyricism to the plight of migrants while showing there's always a new way to make a documentary.

An older, wiser Julie (Honor Swinton Byrne) reflects.



Top to bottom: With on/off screen mum Rosalind/Tilda; Richard Ayoade as egocentric Patrick; Pete (Harris Dickinson).

[FILM]

THE SOUVENIR PART II



OUT 4 FEBRUARY
CERT 15 / 107 MINS

DIRECTOR Joanna Hogg

CAST Honor Swinton Byrne, Tilda Swinton, Ariane Labed, Richard Ayoade

PLOT 1980s Britain. Following the death of her manipulative, heroin-addicted boyfriend, film-school student Julie Harte (Swinton Byrne) decides to change her graduation project into a dramatised version of her tragic relationship. But, sifting through the facts to find the fiction, turning her life into art proves to be far from easy.

IN ONE OF many brilliant scenes in *The Souvenir Part II*, a quiet drama is built around the accidental smashing of a much-loved ceramic sugar bowl. Aptly enough, Joanna Hogg's second chapter of her semi-autobiographical brace is a film about picking up the pieces. It effortlessly feels of a piece with its progenitor but it is so much more: still intimate and fragile, but played out on a more expansive canvas. Like, say, *The Empire Strikes Back* or *Aliens*, it does what every

good sequel should do — blow the world of the first film wide open — except it does it without AT-ATs or power loaders, instead just powerful, personal, inventive filmmaking.

At its heart, *The Souvenir Part II* is a portrait of a young woman getting to grips with a broken life in general and her nascent creativity in particular. After the death of her heroin-addicted lover Anthony at the end of the first film, Honor Swinton Byrne's film-school student Julie Harte — the J.H. initials suggest the director's alter-ego — is at a turning point in her filmmaking. Jettisoning her project about working-class life in the Sunderland docks, Julie decides to make a version of her relationship with Anthony. Hogg, ripping from her own time at film school, paints a painfully believable portrait of student filmmaking, the sense of rivalry, squabbles — there is a fantastic argument in the back of a minibus — and the idiosyncratic, indecisive process of a young filmmaker failing to share their vision with the cast and crew.

Julie also takes her first steps in the professional film world through vividly realised pop-promo shoots and reuniting with flamboyant filmmaker Patrick (Richard Ayoade), whom she met briefly in the first flick. Ayoade is *Part II*'s secret weapon, an egomaniacal auteur who compares himself to Scorsese (an executive producer on both *Souvenir* films) and dismisses praise during editing ("That's marvellously generic." "You're forcing me to have a tantrum"),

yet finds notes of pathos in a third-act meeting with Julie in Soho in the rain.

Around Julie's filmmaking exploits Hogg adds in different textures. Post Anthony, Julie has three very different relationships with three very different men — intense actor Jim (Charlie Heaton), the miscast star of her own short, Pete (Harris Dickinson), and a sweet film editor (Joe Alwyn) — and rediscovers sex (no spoilers). There are also beautifully played scenes with Julie and her parents (Tilda Swinton, James Spencer Ashworth), perfectly toggling between affection and reserve.

But this is Honor Swinton Byrne's film, No longer in the shadow of Tom Burke's overbearing Anthony, she comes into her own here, still a quiet, delicate presence, but one that is absolutely absorbing. Hogg's control of her filmmaking palate throughout is immense — Julie's final 'film' is 'Part I' filtered through Powell & Pressburger — but perhaps her biggest accomplishment is drawing something honest and true from the fabrication of filmmaking; about living with tragedy, about finding your own voice and ultimately about growing up. Hats off, J.H.. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT Joanna Hogg delivers an object lesson in how to deliver a follow-up: deeper, funnier, more imaginative than its predecessor, *The Souvenir Part II* is a filmmaker working at the peak of her powers.

★★★★★
The Telegraph

★★★★★
The Guardian

★★★★★
THE TIMES

★★★★★
BBC CULTURE

“THE BEST FILM OF THE YEAR.”

The Guardian

“BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH
gives a blistering, career-best performance. He is in astonishing,
menacing form, and shows total mastery.”

The Telegraph

VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER  BEST DIRECTOR
JANE CAMPION

9 LONDON CRITICS' CIRCLE FILM AWARDS NOMINATIONS
BEST ACTOR
BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH
BEST FILM



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THE EYES OF TAMMY FAYE

★★★

OUT 4 FEBRUARY / CERT TBC / 125 MINS

DIRECTOR Michael Showalter

CAST Jessica Chastain, Andrew Garfield, Cherry Jones, Vincent D'Onofrio

There's a lot to be said about televangelism, and this biopic of Tammy Faye Bakker (Jessica Chastain), one of its leading lights in the 1970s and 1980s, goes some way to interrogating the grungy reality behind the ministering. As a Christian leader Bakker did some commendable things — she was a rare televangelist who embraced the LGBT+ community — but she also turned a blind eye to her distant husband Jim's (Andrew Garfield) corruption. The film's handsomely made — director Michael Showalter warms the palette into golds and reds as Tammy and Jim get to work — but can't quite explain why we should cheer for Tammy. It's an impressive performance from Chastain and a fascinating subject, but the film doesn't delve deep enough into Bakker's inner life. **HOH**



PETROV'S FLU

★★★

OUT 11 FEBRUARY / CERT 18 / 146 MINS

DIRECTOR Kirill Serebrennikov

CAST Semyon Serzin, Chulpan Khamatova, Yuliya Peresild

Petrov's Flu is the first film made by Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov since his release from a 20-month period of house arrest and has the no-holds-barred quality of a filmmaker let loose. It's essentially a day in the life of influenza-ridden comic-book writer Petrov (Semyon Serzin), making his way across the city of Yekaterinburg, but Serebrennikov throws in the kitchen sink — flying saucers, kung-fu, rough sex, political satire, a whole section in black-and-white — as, without warning, the story jumps around time, space and characters. The hallucinatory filmmaking gives Serebrennikov's film the feel of watching through the fog of a cold, an idealised flashback to a simpler time that provides much-needed respite. Bravura and baffling in equal measures. **IF**



AMULET

★★★

OUT 28 JANUARY / CERT 15 / 99 MINS

DIRECTOR Romola Garai

CAST Alec Secareanu, Imelda Staunton, Carla Juri, Angeliki Papoulia

Using a decaying house as a metaphor in horror movies isn't new, but in her first feature, director Romola Garai executes it impeccably. Peeling wallpaper, spreading mould and dirty, glugging water become things for Tomas (Alec Secareanu) — a homeless migrant worker who moves in with Magda (Carla Juri) and her dying mother — to fix. The grim surroundings contrast with subtle performances — Secareanu's wide-eyed stillness, Juri's odd naivety — but *Amulet's* crescendo is its downfall. Rushing into trippy surrealism as it reaches its convoluted conclusion, it attempts to thread together themes like guilt, motherhood and female rage. It doesn't all work, but Garai's boldness is admirable, and *Amulet* is still a fascinating, nightmarish debut. **SB**



WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY

★★★★

OUT 11 FEBRUARY / CERT 15 / 121 MINS

DIRECTOR Ryūsuke Hamaguchi

CAST Kotone Furukawa, Kiyohiko Shibukawa, Katsuki Mori, Fusako Urabe, Aoba Kawai

After the quietly sweeping *Drive My Car*, with *Wheel Of Fortune And Fantasy*, Ryūsuke Hamaguchi has weaved another gentle and powerful web of human intimacy. Within its spry two hours are three rewarding short stories that initially sound like TV melodramas. There's a love triangle; a plot to seduce and disgrace a professor; and a school reunion in a future without computers. These slight tales don't reach Hamaguchi's previously realised emotional depth, and the third story is given arguably unnecessary worldbuilding. However, within their heightened worlds, these narratives are ambitious, incredibly moving tales that, via precise dialogue and delicate performances, tenderly reveal the value and power of making simple human connections. **JC**



THE 355

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 12A / 123 MINS

DIRECTOR Simon Kinberg

CAST Jessica Chastain, Diane Kruger, Lupita Nyong'o, Penélope Cruz

At last, there's a charismatic, female-centric team of super-spies to balance all those male-led thrillers. Jessica Chastain's Mace is sent to retrieve the sort of crypto-doomsday device familiar from a thousand other spy capers, and ends up teaming up with a multinational group of women to save the world. These spies are both fierce and fun, and the film's best scenes involve them holing up together and planning. Their chases, fights and fun bits of spy-craft are brightly and pacily shot but it would be nice to see some nuance for the male characters here. Unfortunately, the story is less innovative than the casting, and the twists are screamingly obvious even to those without secret-agent training. **HOH**



SING 2

★★

OUT 28 FEBRUARY / CERT TBC / 110 MINS

DIRECTOR Garth Jennings

CAST (VOICES) Matthew McConaughey, Reese Witherspoon, Scarlett Johansson, Halsey

A gentle gorilla, dressed in a leather jacket with spikes, sings an impassioned cover of Coldplay's 'A Sky Full Of Stars', while duelling with a proboscis monkey in a literal ring of fire. This is but one detail of *Sing 2*, the sensorially overwhelming — yet strangely low-stakes — sequel to 2016's animated jukebox musical. New additions include Bono, who lends his voice to play reclusive musician Clay Calloway, while Halsey steals the show as entitled princess Porsha Crystal. They join Matthew McConaughey's koala, Buster Moon, and his gang by putting on their biggest stage show and, while there are familiar pleasures in the head-spinning vignettes (a sunset street-dance duet, a dreamy, romantic spin on 'Say A Little Prayer'), the original's ridiculous novelty has somewhat faded. **EK**

★★★★★
The Telegraph

★★★★★
The Guardian

★★★★★
THE TIMES

★★★★★
BBC CULTURE

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She has orchestrated the best film of her impressive career.”

VARIETY

“KIRSTEN DUNST
delivers the best performance of her career.”

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Mothers in arms:
Janis (Penélope
Cruz) and Ana
(Milena Smit).



Top to bottom: *Parallel bumps*; Aitana Sánchez-Gijón as Ana's mum; Photographer Arturo (Israel Elejalde) in the frame.

[FILM]

PARALLEL MOTHERS



OUT 28 JANUARY
CERT 15 / 120 MINS

DIRECTOR Pedro Almodóvar

CAST Penélope Cruz, Milena Smit, Aitana Sánchez Gijón, Israel Elejalde, Rossy de Palma

PLOT Two single women, middle-aged Janis (Cruz) and teenager Ana (Smit), meet in hospital and bond over their similar predicaments. As they leave with their babies, their lives are about to become entwined in increasingly complex and testing ways.

PARALLEL MOTHERS IS a magic trick courtesy of Pedro Almodóvar. Built on a potentially farcical premise — two women giving birth in hospital at the same time — it is the synthesis of his early, funny ones and later more restrained works, at once a comedy full of plot twists and revelations that build up at a dizzying rate, and a serious, emotionally grounded look at maternal bonds and the draw of family. If it's not quite top-tier PA, it is built with both flare and precision and, in their eighth

film together, emerges as a fantastic showcase for the Pedro Almodóvar-Penélope Cruz dream team.

Cruz is Janis (named after Janis Joplin), a high-end photographer we meet taking pictures of forensic anthropologist Arturo (Israel Elejalde). Janis asks for Arturo's help in exhuming the mass grave where her grandfather's body was buried after he was executed by the Falangists in the early days of the Spanish Civil War. At this point it feels like we're going to get Pedro The Mature of *Julieta* and *Pain And Glory*, delivering a coruscating look at how the horrors of Franco's Spain play out in the present. But then Pedro The Cheeky takes hold and *Parallel Mothers* becomes something else: a soap opera-infused romp. Janis has quick, breathless sex with Arturo and, revealed by an audacious jump-cut that scythes through acres of exposition, ends up in hospital pregnant with his child. She is sharing a room — obviously Almodóvar manages to get colours popping in a sterile maternity ward — with teen mother Ana (Milena Smit, terrific). The two women become fast friends and decide to swap numbers.

To reveal what happens next is to suck the fun out of Almodóvar's deceptively light film — suffice it to say the new mothers start to bond as their lives begin to criss-cross in increasingly extreme and complicated ways. For the Almodóvar faithful, all the tics and touchstones

are present and correct: a celebration of the strengths and suffering of women; a striking Hitchcockian score by Alberto Iglesias; flawless filmmaking (witness the care and attention lavished on a close-up of a computer mouse), and the welcome return of the director's stalwart, Rossy de Palma, playing Janis' agent and confidante. But the jewel in the crown is the Almodóvar-Cruz collaboration. Cruz grounds the potentially ridiculous scenarios with empathy and feeling so that whatever direction the movie goes in, you go with it. Playing a woman holding a secret she is bursting to let out, she is riveting.

The movie's grip slackens a little in its middle section but, as it enters the final third, Almodóvar, always amongst the most nimble of filmmakers, spirals back to the undertow of the Spanish Civil War, the unmarked grave of Janis' family standing in for the litany of atrocities committed by Franco's regime. The director's conclusion is typical: a group of women, standing in solidarity, drawing strength from the memory of their ancestors. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT Almodóvar juggles comedy and drama to terrifically entertaining ends, aided by a tip-top Penélope Cruz. It's hard to think of a more exciting actor-director partnership working today.



The Telegraph



The Guardian



THE TIMES



BBC CULTURE

“A dazzling, uncompromising work by one of the
GREATEST DIRECTORS OF ALL TIME.”

AWARDS DAILY

“**KODI SMIT-MCPHEE**
is terrifyingly remarkable. The exchanges between Benedict Cumberbatch
and Kodi Smit-McPhee are riveting.”

THE WRAP

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Family values: Jamie Dornan as Pa
with Jude Hill as Buddy.



[FILM]

BELFAST

★★★★

OUT 21 JANUARY
CERT 12A / 98 MINS

DIRECTOR Kenneth Branagh

CAST Caitriona Balfe, Judi Dench, Jamie Dornan, Ciarán Hinds, Jude Hill

PLOT Belfast, August 1969. As the Protestants mount a full-on assault on Catholic households, nine-year-old Buddy (Hill) is coming to terms with love, religion, growing up and the prospect of leaving his stomping ground for a life in England.

BELFAST, KENNETH BRANAGH'S semi-autobiographical take on growing up in Northern Ireland's capital during the tumultuous '60s, ends with a dedication for the ones who stayed, left and were lost. It's a sentiment redolent of the filmmaker's big-hearted, emotionally direct approach. While it lacks the dramatic heft of the similar *Roma*, Branagh applies epic filmmaking style, driven by a bouncy Van Morrison score, to a small, intimate scenario. Winning the People's Choice Award at Toronto, *Belfast* doesn't tell a linear yarn; instead, it's an assemblage of anecdotes and moments that will charm and spark with wherever and whenever you grew up.

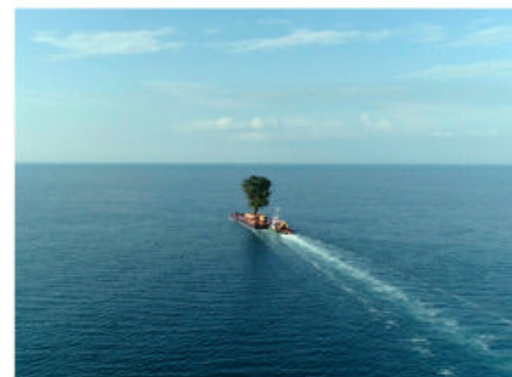
It starts in colour with a touristy view of the city — the Harland & Wolff docks, the Titanic hotel — until a crane shot moving over a wall reveals a street in 1969, now in striking black-and-white. Cinematographer Haris Zambarloukos' camera flies and glides around the busy street, which turns into a riot as Protestant gangs torch Catholic homes. Caught in the melee is nine-year-old Buddy (Jude Hill), the youngest member of a Protestant family that includes Buddy's older brother Will (an under-served Lewis McAskie), Pa (Jamie

Dornan), who works over the water as a joiner to pay off tax debts so is rarely home, Ma (*Outlander*'s Caitriona Balfe), doggedly keeping the family on the straight and narrow, plus Pop (Ciarán Hinds) and Granny (Judi Dench).

The Troubles serves as an undercurrent rather than a leading player, making *Belfast* much more of a memory movie than a political diatribe. Most of the film is concerned with Buddy's misunderstandings (about politics and religion) and misadventures (falls for the local Catholic swot, mucks up stealing a Turkish Delight), Hill making a natural, engaging Branagh surrogate. Dornan is a mostly genial dad figure, while Hinds and Dench drop moments of gravitas, but Balfe is the star here and gives the film's stand-out speech about the dangers of leaving home — the chemistry she shares with Dornan is tangible.

Branagh's filmmaking frequently goes for broke. Sometimes it misses — using *High Noon*'s 'Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darlin' to turn a street showdown into a Western face-off cheapens the moment — but mostly it's grandiloquent and luminous. He's also mounted an affectionate tribute to late-'60s childhood ephemera (footballer Danny Blanchflower, Thunderbirds suits, Corgi Aston Martin DB5s) and visits to the movies splashed with colour, life through different eyes; though a trip to see *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* feels a little over-the-top — the family reacting to flying sequences like they are on a rollercoaster. Branagh's movie-movie tendencies emerge again when Pa launches into an exuberant rendition of 'Everlasting Love', sung to his wife. Still, *Belfast* is the kind of film where you occasionally print the legend, not the truth. And given the context in which Branagh grew up, you can absolutely see why. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT *Belfast* is exactly the kind of film that wins an audience award at a festival — highly entertaining and beautifully done without ever being innovative or challenging, finding the universal in the specific, the upbeat in dire circumstances. Slight but winning.



TAMING THE GARDEN

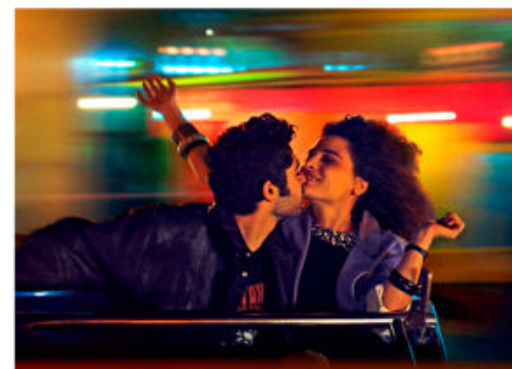
★★★★

OUT 28 JANUARY / CERT TBC / 92 MINS

DIRECTOR Salomé Jashi

PARTICIPANTS None credited

If you need proof of how far things have tilted in favour of the super-rich, look no further than the operation to uproot, transport and replant dozens of mature trees to satisfy the whim of a Georgian billionaire. Discreetly eavesdropping with a watchful camera on the grumbling locals seeing their natural heritage being vandalised, documentarian Salomé Jashi employs a mix of grit and lyricism to capture the effort and ingenuity required to excavate and relocate the trees. But she also subtly invites viewers to consider the ecological effects of these transplants, as well as what they say about migration, putting down roots and the philistine ruthlessness of capitalism. A stealthily provocative and unflinchingly compelling metaphor for a world gone mad. **DP**



MEMORY BOX

★★★

OUT 21 JANUARY / CERT 15 / 101 MINS

DIRECTORS Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige

CAST Rim Turki, Manal Issa, Paloma Vauthier, Clémence Sabbagh

War, memory and generation gaps fuel Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's multi-layered, dual-timelined family drama. The story's real-life roots imbue gravitas, although all has been created anew, down to the contents of a 'memory box' from Lebanon delivered on Christmas Eve to three generations of women in Montreal: Téta (Clémence Sabbagh), her daughter Maia (Rim Turki) and granddaughter Alex (Paloma Vauthier). Buried recollections resurface, some lovely, some traumatic, causing conflict but also catharsis in this small family. Weighty existential and formal ambitions are not always in harmony, but when they are, it's magic. **SMK**

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TWISTED”



Neil Smith,
Total Film

“INTENSE
& INTENSELY
STYLISH”



Ryan Leston,
NME



Mark Kermode,
The Observer



Robbie Collin,
The Telegraph



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Clockwise from main: Look who's back; Morpheus (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II) and Bugs (Jessica Henwick); Hands up if Tiffany (Carrie-Ann Moss) looks familiar to you, Thomas (Keanu Reeves).

[FILM]

THE MATRIX RESURRECTIONS

★★★

OUT 22 DECEMBER
CERT 15 / 148 MINS

DIRECTOR Lana Wachowski

CAST Keanu Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Jessica Henwick

PLOT Two decades after Neo supposedly died, we find his synthetic alter-ego Thomas Anderson (Reeves) living out his life obliviously, munching blue pills prescribed by his therapist (Neil Patrick Harris). In recovery from a mental breakdown, he's having visions, and after meeting the familiar Tiffany (Moss), his world starts to open up.

THE LEGACY OF 1999's *The Matrix* endures and evolves. It has been exalted, co-opted, bastardised. With every passing day, the film, directed by Lilly and Lana Wachowski, seems to mean different things to different people, who all claim it as their own. To some it's merely a groundbreaking, hugely influential, oft-imitated sci-fi action movie that's rarely

been bettered. To some it's a trans allegory. To some it's about truth, and reality, and sheeple. "Take the red pill," tweeted Elon Musk in May 2020. "Taken!", responded Ivana Trump. "Fuck both of you," replied Lilly Wachowski. Thank you and goodnight.

Lilly has sat out the fourth instalment, preferring to move onto other things, so this is a Lana joint. And she has made a film about legacy itself: about Neo and Trinity's legacy, about Keanu Reeves' and Carrie-Anne Moss' legacy, and literally about *The Matrix's* legacy. *The Matrix* — as a piece of intellectual property — is mentioned often in this film, which might easily have been titled 'The Matrix Rebooted', if only the Matrix in *The Matrix* hadn't already been rebooted in *The Matrix Revolutions*. Welcome to the metaverse! Take a red pill, or at least a Tango Ice Blast, and strap on your synthetic seatbelt.

It dives into that legacy from the off, as Jessica Henwick's Resistance leader, Bugs, watches someone who looks like Trinity doing what Trinity did at the beginning of that first film, while characters say the same things other characters said. Bugs — who is in awe of Neo and Trinity and has studied them for years — has seen this before. She knows what happens. As do we.

In San Francisco we are reacquainted with Thomas Anderson (Reeves), now a video-game designer who wrote a trilogy of games called 'The



Matrix' and who has *Matrix* action figures on his desk (literally Carrie-Anne Moss' Trinity, guns blazing). A colleague does a Keanu/Neo impersonation: "Lots of guns." We are shown clips from 'The Matrix' game, actually clips from *The Matrix* film. Another colleague laments that "our beloved parent company Warner Bros. is going to make a sequel to the trilogy". In a coffee shop called Simulatte (nothing is considered too on-the-nose here — it's a laugh), Thomas meets Tiffany (Moss), who, well, reminds him of someone. Her husband arrives — he's called Chad, and he's played by *John Wick* director Chad Stahelski, who was Reeves' stunt double on *The Matrix*. This all happens.



For a good while, *The Matrix Resurrections* is fabulously batty. It's cheeky and sly, comprising endless onion-layers (if the onion even exists at all, etc); it's funny and weird and witty and mad and even, at points, quite moving. Certainly we've never seen anything like it, not on this scale, not in a Hollywood blockbuster, not like this.

Then the plot kicks in, and, well, so does tradition. It's quite odd that for all the ribbing, the self-awareness, the playfulness, it gets comfortably generic, for the most part losing that sense of fun. The action scenes are fine — occasionally inspired, mostly familiar; if you're hoping for *Resurrections* to change the game again you might want to temper your expectations. Some of the overtly CG stuff, aesthetic throwbacks to the less-beloved sequels, even feel like video-game cutscenes. That is unlikely to be intentionally meta. And, alas, some of the portentousness of those sequels is resurrected too. Which is a shame, when it's frontloaded with so much delightful tomfoolery. The self-awareness diminishes exponentially.

When asked a few months ago why she wasn't involved, Lilly Wachowski said that she just wasn't of a mind to do a retread, to do something she'd done before. Lana felt the opposite. Their parents having just died, she found solace in bringing back to life the other couple — Neo and Trinity — that had meant so much to her. “Nothing comforts anxiety like a little nostalgia,” says the new Morpheus (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II) in *Resurrections*. And it *is* cheering seeing Reeves and Moss back at it again. It's romantic and sentimental and sometimes touching. But it also feels somewhat superficial, and nothing in the film feels like it is of huge consequence: there's little to hang on to. There is joy here, and a couple of gobsmacking ideas (one of them outstandingly morbid), but it's a shame that, having set out a brand-new roadmap, *Resurrections* forgets where it's going. And reverses. **ALEX GODFREY**

VERDICT *Resurrections* suffers from an identity crisis, going from being supremely fun and knowing to weirdly pedestrian. It's a slippery mish-mash — entertaining in big bursts but ultimately a little hollow.

Soldiering on:
Chanté Adams
and Michael
B. Jordan.



ON SCREEN

[FILM]

A JOURNAL FOR JORDAN



OUT 21 JANUARY
CERT TBC / 131 MINS

DIRECTOR Denzel Washington

CAST Michael B. Jordan, Chanté Adams, Jalon Christian

PLOT First Sergeant Charles Monroe King's (Jordan) deployment to Iraq puts his life and relationship with partner Dana Canedy (Chanté Adams) in jeopardy. Fearing he might not make it home, he pens a heartfelt journal for his newborn son, Jordan (Christian).

IF DENZEL WASHINGTON'S last directorial outing *Fences* was an Academy Award-nominated portrayal of dysfunctional families, then *A Journal For Jordan* is its cutesy, cookie-cutter follow-up. Based on the memoirs of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Dana Canedy, it's a thin, mostly uneventful relationship flick, enlivened by engaging performances by Chanté Adams and Michael B. Jordan.

Virgil Williams' screenplay sketches Canedy's love story with First Sergeant Charles Monroe King (Jordan) as a melodrama without the drama (a melo). In a typical case of career-over-everything, Dana's pursuit of success in her career as a *New York Times* journalist sees her put matters of the heart on the back burner. However, a (not-so) chance encounter puts King — a soldier who had served under her father — on her doorstep. The two quickly form the type of mushy union that you would find nestled in a Valentine's Day card that plays Stevie Wonder jingles when you open it: dates in Central Park, coyness about the sleeping arrangements, a bit — remember this is 2022 — where neither of the lovestruck couple can end a phone call (“No, you

hang up”). It's a sweet-natured but not particularly gripping love story, the only fly in the ointment coming when Dana gets upset when Charles doesn't call because he's looking after one his soldiers. It feels contrived, and sets up a thematic idea around a soldier caught between his relationship and loyalty to his unit that never becomes compelling.

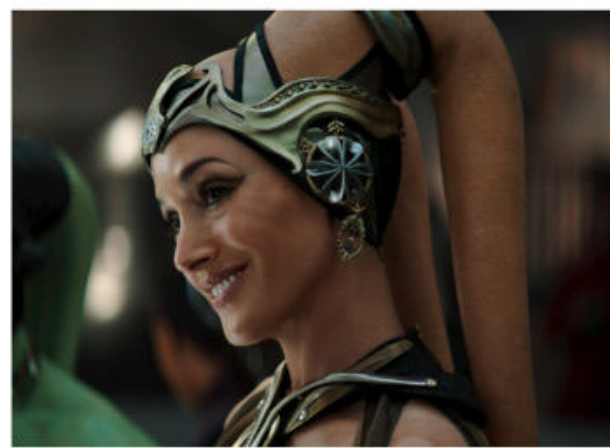
Washington's direction feels more small-screen than big — save an impressionistic opening teasing Charlie's death, he does little of interest with framing, lighting or editing — and the film's criss-crossing timelines are difficult to keep track of. To make matters more disjointed, it forgets to make space for either of the things mentioned in the film's title, Jordan (Jalon Christian, charming) and the journal (some feat considering the film is over two hours long). Both feel shoehorned in at the end in a film that becomes completely detached from its first act. It's a movie that does everything it can to dissipate tension — we know Dana and Charles' relationship works out because they have a son, and we learn Charles is killed on duty in Iraq from the get-go. As such, *A Journal For Jordan* plays out like a two-hour formality.

Still, Adams and Jordan are an endearing couple, the former strong as a woman who struggles with affection, shaded by her military upbringing; the latter as a wide-eyed soldier with an unlikely knack for pointillist paintings, finding some nakedly emotional moments to round out his polite-to-a-fault soldier. The pair create authentic exchanges of affection which, in an age where Black love stories that aren't rooted in trauma are a rarity in Hollywood, is refreshing. It's just a shame that the rest of the film couldn't match up to them. **WHELAN BARZEY**

VERDICT *A Journal For Jordan* is probably better suited to the page than the screen. Despite winning chemistry from Michael B. Jordan and Chanté Adams, Denzel Washington's film etches a romance that rarely delivers substance or surprises.



Deadly duo: Boba Fett (Temuera Morrison) and Fennec Shand (Ming-Na Wen).



Top to bottom: Jennifer Beals as Garsa Fwip; Boba escapes the Sarlacc pit; Four arms good, two arms... not so good.

[TV]

THE BOOK OF BOBA FETT

★★★★

OUT NOW (DISNEY+)
EPISODES VIEWED 2 OF 7

SHOWRUNNERS Jon Favreau, Dave Filoni, Robert Rodriguez

CAST Temuera Morrison, Ming-Na Wen, Jennifer Beals

PLOT Haunted by dreams of his brutal past, new crime lord Boba Fett (Morrison) holds court in the palace once owned by Jabba The Hutt. Aided by deadly assassin Fennec Shand (Wen), he is taking his first steps into a much larger underworld.

SINCE HIS FILM debut in 1980's *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, a lot of mythological scaffolding has been erected around bounty hunter Boba Fett, a character who, in the original trilogy, speaks four lines in a total of 11 scenes. Much of Fett's appeal is built around his cool look and wicked ambiguity, coalescing to create the most unknowable character in the *Star Wars* galaxy. After George Lucas began to puncture the enigma in *Attack Of The Clones* ("Get 'im, Dad!"),

now Jon Favreau, Dave Filoni and Robert Rodriguez (who directs the first episode) peek further behind the olive-green breast-plate to sketch both the past and present of the mercenary's mercenary. The result is a solid, enjoyable, if slightly unremarkable start.

Whatever you say about *The Book Of Boba Fett*'s first episode — 'Chapter 1: Stranger In A Strange Land' — Favreau, Filoni and Rodriguez go for it from the off. With Fett submerged in bacta fluid, we see disturbed memories of his past life: the rain-swept Kamino, the battlefield of Geonosis and a (not particularly satisfactory) answer to how he escaped from the Sarlacc pit. Most of the flashback picks up with Fett as a prisoner of a band of Tusken Raiders, the bounty hunter sharing screen time with a pink Rodian and a particularly rabid watchdog. These Dune Sea sequences involve a lot of wandering around the desert, pesky youngling Sand People and a thrilling nod to Ray Harryhausen.

The episode feels more interesting when it moves to the present tense. The showrunners have made no bones that *The Book Of Boba Fett* owes a h/t (helmet tip) to *The Godfather* and, while no-one wakes up with a bantha head in their bed (yet), the series opener is full of gangster business to make Michael Corleone feel at home. These sequences have fun with the newly minted "Lord" Fett trying to find his feet as a *capo*, realising he needs a protocol

droid when he is holding court, coming to terms with lording it over people he used to work for and debating with Fennec Shand (Ming-Na Wen) about being carried through the streets like Jabba as a mark of power.

'Chapter 2: The Tribes Of Tatooine', directed by Steph Green (*The Americans*, *Watchmen*), continues the '*Godfather Part II*' dual timeline, with Fett and Shand finally meeting Mok Shaiz, the Ithorian mayor, and facing down twin Hutts (Jabba's cousins) in a street showdown that doesn't come to much. The majority of the episode flips back to Fett with the Tusken Raiders, learning their ways (snorting a lizard with mind-altering capabilities, making gaffi sticks) and teaching them some of his own (there are speeder-bike riding lessons) as the unlikely alliance mount an exciting train heist.

Two episodes in, the chemistry between Morrison and Wen is engaging and it feels 100 per cent *Star Wars*. But there is nothing to blow you away — no big twists or reveals — and it is yet to feel essential. As to whether Fett would have been better remaining a galactic man of mystery, the jury is still out. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT It's an entertaining enough, low-key start, with Fett's gangster's paradise the most compelling aspect. But, two episodes in, it desperately needs a bit of jet-pack propulsion.



[TV]

COBRA KAI: SEASON 4



OUT NOW (NETFLIX)
EPISODES VIEWED 10 OF 10

SHOWRUNNERS Josh Heald, Jon Hurwitz, Hayden Schlossberg
CAST William Zabka, Ralph Macchio, Martin Kove, Mary Mouser, Xolo Maridueña

PLOT With the future of both their dojos on the line, Johnny Lawrence (Zabka) and Daniel LaRusso (Macchio) join forces to take down John Kreese (Kove) and his Cobra Kai at the All-Valley Karate Tournament. But old rivalries don't die easily, and Kreese has an ace up his sleeve in the form of an old friend...

THE KARATE KID Part III might not have been the most illustrious entry in the wax-on/wax-off saga, but it did introduce a compelling wrinkle, driving a wedge between Daniel LaRusso (Ralph Macchio) and his bonsai-trimming mentor, Mr Miyagi (Pat Morita). This fourth season of Netflix's hugely enjoyable spin-off — which takes most of its cues from that film — introduces its own existential discord by having Daniel and Johnny Lawrence (William Zabka) engage in a battle for their students' souls.

Burying the hatchet to take on John Kreese (Martin Kove) and his Cobra Kai, Daniel's Miyagi-do school and Johnny's oh-so-metal Eagle Fang Karate combine classes to train for the All-Valley Tournament, which will decide which dojos stay open and which hang up their black belts for good. For Daniel, karate is all meditation, painting fences and restraint, which strikes an unlikely chord with Johnny's star pupil, Miguel (Xolo Maridueña), irritating his sensei no end. Meanwhile, Eagle Fang's training regime involves students whacking each other repeatedly in the crotch, jumping off buildings, and roundhouse-

kicking the sea, which draws out the wild side in Daniel's daughter, Sam (Mary Mouser). The bickering senseis are even more entertaining as odd-couple frenemies than they were as rivals, and if Daniel's dime-store Buddha routine wears slightly thin at times (deep sai), the same cannot be said of Zabka's Johnny. His unreconstructed '80s doofus remains as riotous as ever, whether in asserting his fragile masculinity ("Do I look like I pee sitting down?") or frantically Googling "How do I tell my student I'm banging his mom?"

The joy of *Cobra Kai* is, as ever, in its wry self-awareness, this time not only styling out comparisons to *Rocky III* but deliberately cranking up the ham factor, thanks to the return of *Karate Kid III*'s pony-tailed tormentor, Terry Silver (Thomas Ian Griffith). With only a passing reflection on past misdeeds — "I was hopped-up on cocaine and revenge!" — he walks away from a life of tofu canapés to rejoin the Cobras, teaming up with Klove's Kreese to form a duo so outrageous as to make even the most '80s of villains look positively restrained.

Despite the presence of Silver, the addition of new kid Kenny (Dallas Dupree Young), and a slight reshuffle of the dojo rosters (the show pulls off face/heel switcheroos that put the WWE to shame), Season 4 does run out of steam slightly in the middle, keeping its powder dry for the big finale. Thankfully, the tournament doesn't disappoint, inexplicably granting this high-school sporting event all the razzmatazz of an *X-Factor* finale, while putting on a battle for the ages that sees bad blood boil over, while yanking our loyalties to and fro.

There's nothing quite as bonkers as Season 2's high-school rumble (the Jets and Sharks have nothing on these warring dojos), but this fourth year is a glossier affair, capped with a show-stopping finale that somehow manages to raise the stakes yet again as it sets the scene for Season 5. Begun this karate war has. **JAMES DYER**

VERDICT Like a tornado kick to the face, Season 4 may take a while to wind up, but it smacks you squarely in the teeth by the end.

SCREEN CHECKLIST

Your at-a-glance view of this month's reviews



FILM OUT NOW

THE MATRIX RESURRECTIONS ★★★ P44

SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME (ABOVE) ★★★★★ P32

THE 355 ★★★ P38

21 JANUARY

BELFAST ★★★★★ P42

A JOURNAL FOR JORDAN ★★ P45

MASS ★★★★★ P34

MEMORY BOX ★★★ P42

NIGHTMARE ALLEY ★★★★★ P30

28 JANUARY

AMULET ★★★ P38

PARALLEL MOTHERS ★★★★★ P40

TAMING THE GARDEN ★★★★★ P42

4 FEBRUARY

BELLE ★★★★★ P33

THE EYES OF TAMMY FAYE ★★★ P38

THE SOUVENIR PART II ★★★★★ P36

11 FEBRUARY

FLEE ★★★★★ P35

PETROV'S FLU ★★★ P38

WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY ★★★★★ P38

28 FEBRUARY

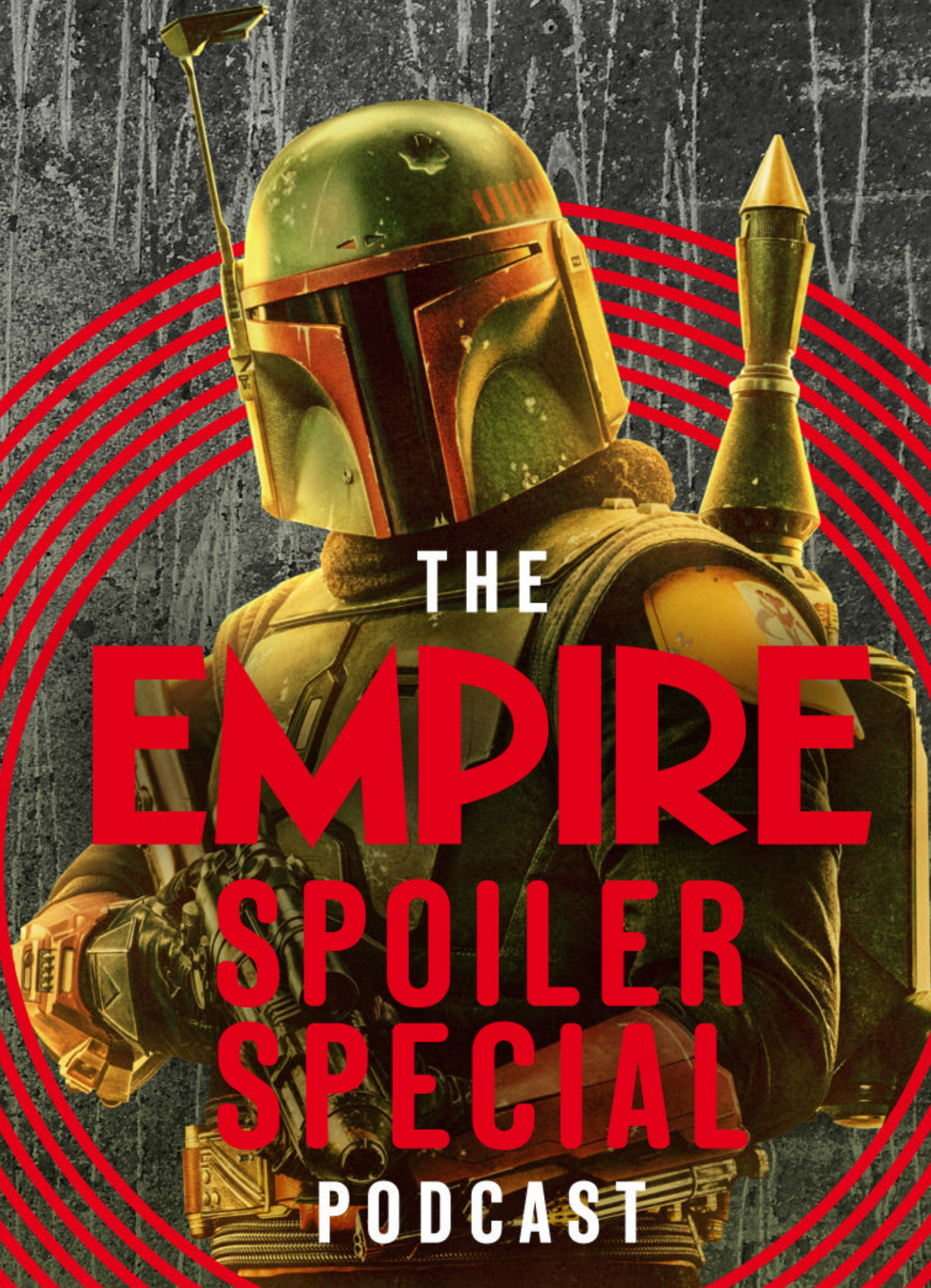
SING 2 ★★ P38

TV OUT NOW

THE BOOK OF BOBA FETT ★★★ P46

COBRA KAI ★★★★★ P47

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EMPIRE presents

THE GODFATHER 50 YEARS OF FATHER

In 1972, **THE GODFATHER** was unleashed on audiences. It was an offer they couldn't refuse: a sweeping gangster epic doubling up as a devastating family drama. We talk to cast and crew about one of the greatest movies ever made

FEATURING **FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA** IN CONVERSATION
DEEP DIVES WITH THE CAST / **THE MARLON BRANDO METHOD**
JOHN CAZALE REMEMBERED

THE 50 YEARS OF GODFATHER

THE GODFATHER changed Francis Ford Coppola's life — and it also changed cinema, forever.

Half a century on, we sit down with the director to reflect on a staggering legacy

WORDS TERRI WHITE PORTRAITS MARK MAHANEY

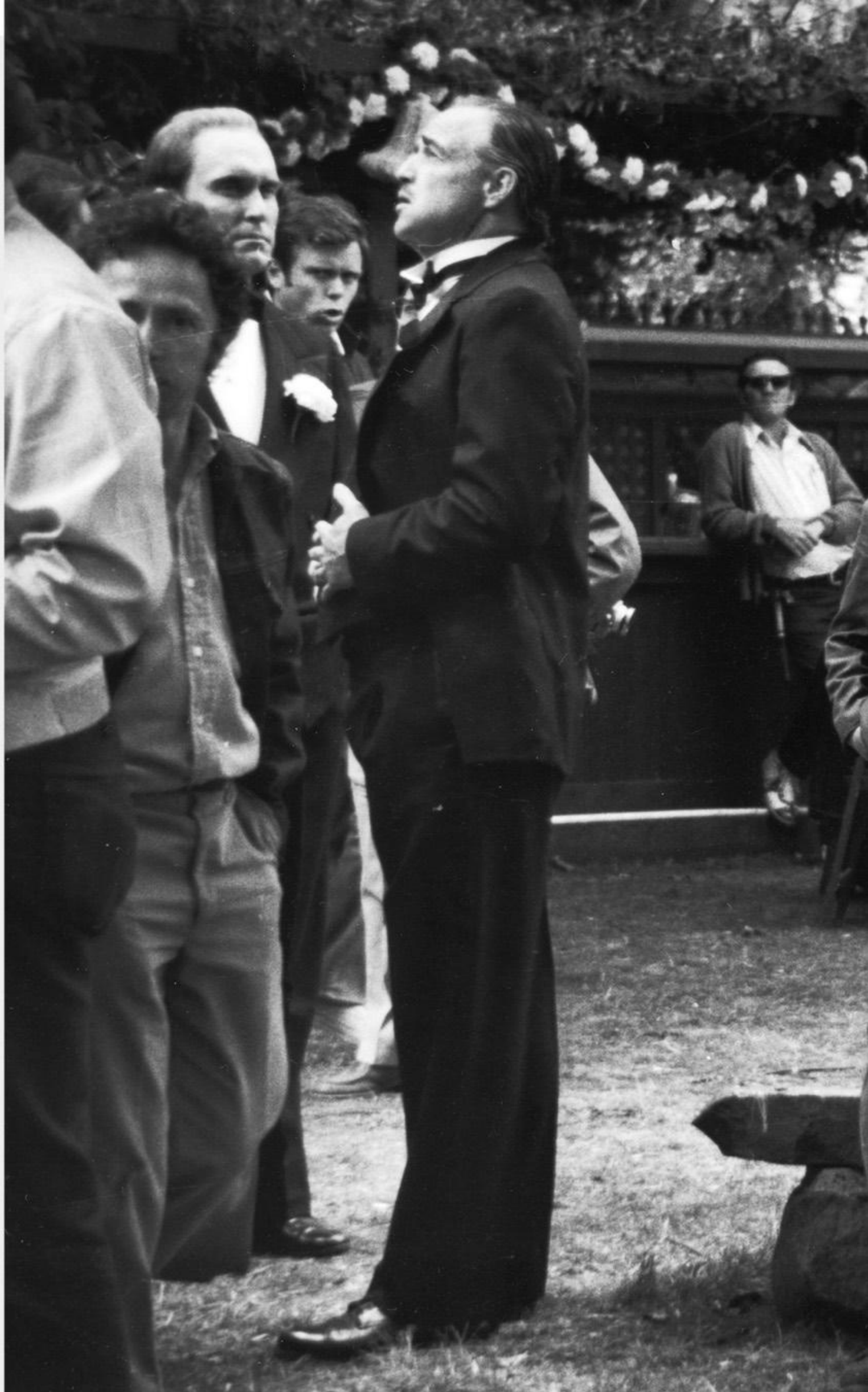
AN AUDIENCE WITH DOON THE





FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA has a lot of feelings about *The Godfather*. As he speaks to *Empire* via Zoom for a celebration of the film's 50th anniversary, it's like he's talking about the events of yesterday. Recounting the frustrations and fights and almost-firings, the shadow of stress dances across the 82-year-old's face, as fresh, you sense, as when he first experienced it. But, out of a "nightmare" experience — with Coppola signed on to write and direct at just 29 — came not just one of the greatest gangster epics ever, but one of the greatest-ever American films.

The story of the Corleone family, of its head Don Corleone (Marlon Brando) and his sons, was one of succession, of loyalty, of legacy. Coppola took a largely unsuccessful genre known for stories of greed and crime and made it about family, first and foremost. It remains a fascinating deconstruction of masculinity and of power, of the very futility of violence. After *The Godfather* dominated the box office on release, it went on to not only inspire countless other filmmakers but also have a resounding cultural impact that reverberates today. Quite simply, no *Godfather*, no *Sopranos*. Coppola himself followed it up with a career of diverse, rich films, but none arguably define him, will define his legacy, quite like *The Godfather*. And as we tug at the knots, it's clear that while he might not have entirely made peace, he's still grateful for a life changed completely by saying yes, in the end, to that offer from Paramount just over five decades ago. Yes, Francis Ford Coppola has a lot of feelings about *The Godfather*. But frankly, don't we all?



Fifty years! How does that feel?

Well, it's odd, of course. To think that 50 years has gone by since the adventure of *The Godfather*, and when that changed my life so dramatically. Because now the Coppola family is considered synonymous with [the film by] many people, [but] when I came to LA, to UCLA Film School, I just dreamed to get a peek inside a studio. Movies were an exotic fairyland.

And the film was a Coppola family affair — your daughter Sofia was in it at just three weeks old, your sons and wife are in the baptism scene, and there's obviously your sister, Talia [Shire].

Well, I knew nothing about gangsters [but] my family, the family style, what it was like to have dinner, all the specifics, the food, the expressions, the songs... I brought a lot of my experience as an Italian family into the making



Left: *Godfather* ringmaster Coppola takes a break on set of his magnum opus, star Marlon Brando beside him.

of *The Godfather*. In a sense, it was a movie about a family made by a family.

Does it now exist as an eternal record of your family?

Yes. No question. Sofia, who is 50 years old today, was a tiny baby, and the only reason she was in the movie was because she was there, and I had to get an infant. Many of the people at the wedding were cousins or people who would

sing at family occasions. That gave the movie a certain flavour of authenticity which distinguished it.

When Paramount first called about directing *The Godfather*, you said no. Was that partly due to concerns about the representation of Italian American culture?

Not at all. My desire was to be the kind of filmmaker who wrote and directed more personal

projects. *The Godfather* was a big successful book. I thought it was a serious work about power, and I was interested. But when I read it, it was more of a potboiler — it's sort of stupid, it's about a woman who has sexual problems. [But] later when I looked at it, I saw that underneath all that other stuff designed to make it a bestseller was a story of a king who had three sons. It was about who was going to take over. It was like a Shakespearean play.



Clockwise from main: Coppola and Brando filming the opening wedding scene; Sonny (James Caan) teaches Carlo (Gianni Russo) a lesson; Curtains for Vito's enforcer Luca Brasi (Lenny Montana); And for McCluskey (Sterling Hayden) and Sollozzo (Al Lettieri).





You had American Zoetrope, your independent production company that needed financial support, and a young family too. When you did accept, was there a financial drive?

We were broke. We were not going to survive. We had made a couple of films, our sponsor Warner Bros. didn't like the films and wasn't going to move ahead with any of them. We were in desperate shape financially; I needed a job, and I had a new baby coming so there was no doubt that we were under financial pressure.

Did you have a sense of why they'd approached you to direct?

I think they figured he's young and has no power, so we can pretty much pressure him to do whatever we want. Two, I was a pretty good screenwriter, or they thought I was, and the

script they had wasn't in very good shape. He's Italian American, so if there's a backlash about this film — insulting, showing them as gangsters — they figured I would take the insult because I was Italian. So, I fit the bill on three counts.

Did you know that other directors had passed at that point?

Well, I heard about that, [but] the book was becoming more and more acclaimed, and why would someone totally unimportant like myself get the job when there were great filmmakers? The truth was there had been a Mafia-type movie, *The Brotherhood* [Paramount's 1968 Kirk Douglas film], and it wasn't successful. The idea of doing another gangster picture was good if they could do it for \$2 million. One of the first things I got in trouble for was I wanted to make it in the '40s, the same as the book, and in New York, where it was set. That made the movie very difficult to do for \$2 million, so immediately, the rumour was I was going to be fired. When I was making *The Godfather*, the rumour every week was some new reason why they were going to fire me...

It's been said that one scene saved you, because the studio saw it and loved it — the restaurant scene.

Yes, and no. I mean, different things saved me at different times. I remember watching the Oscars with my friend Marty Scorsese, and when I won the Oscar for the script of *Patton*, Marty said to me, "Well, I guess they're not going to be able to fire you right away, because you just won the Oscar for a screenplay." That saved me, and each week something else saved me. It's true that the restaurant scene [saved me] but even after that there were still rumours of me getting fired. After Marlon [Brando's] first day, the big rumour was I was going to get fired that week because people watching the film, running it, felt the scene was too dark, you could hardly see him, and that he mumbled. When I said, "Give me a chance, it's his first day, let me go through a second take," they said, "No, you can't." Then someone said, "The reason they don't want you to do it is because this weekend they're going to put a new director in." I just immediately fired all the people who were in my team who were lobbying to get me out. I went up there and shot the scene a second time, and saved myself, basically, by firing all the people who were working to fire *me*. It was very much like that: it was touch-and-go the whole production. There was the perception that I had some power. But I really had no power at all.

That sounds like a nightmare way to work.

It was the worst experience. *Apocalypse Now* was a pretty tough experience for other kinds of reasons, but usually those films, which I'm so well known for, were nightmares to work on. Just the fact that I was young and tenacious and didn't give up is why they even got done. I mean, when you think of all the troubles we had... so 50 years later it's nice to say, okay, *The Godfather* was

a wonderful success — but it was an awful experience. It was terrible. It was a nightmare.

You've said before that just the memory of *The Godfather* brings you "great unhappiness". Does 50 years passing soften the edges of that at all?

It softens. Of course, a lot of people have the theory that you do your best work when you're under tension. I don't think so. *The Godfather Part II*, I had a lot of power, and it was a bigger, more complicated and difficult film to do, and there was no-one firing me because I was then powerful. I was the boss. That was one of the smoothest productions I ever worked on.

Is that power ever real? Because you've only got it as long as the next thing you do is a success.

Well, a very wise man told me when I was a kid and doing plays in college, "When you're the director... in the end when the show comes out, if it's a hit and successful they're all going to say how wonderful you were to work with. If it's a flop, no matter what the truth is, they're going to say you were terrible to work with," and that's a little bit the truth. The memory of *The Godfather* — now everyone is coming out of the woodwork and saying, "Well, I did this part of it, and I did that part of it." They're making a television show about the making of *The Godfather* [*The Offer*], from the point of view of one of the producers who was never around, he was always in arguments with the Mafia. So, everyone is enjoying the success of the film 50 years later, and that's fine. We had many talented people who contributed to *The Godfather*. It was not by any means just me and Mario [Puzo, the co-writer].

What was the single biggest challenge with the studio? You had to fight for both Brando and Pacino.

Well, they didn't like the idea of shooting it in New York, because of costs. They didn't like the cast — they didn't want Al Pacino; they didn't want Marlon Brando. It was said very eloquently by the Head [Of Production], he had a Viennese accent, "We tested every actor in Hollywood, they were all terrible. How is it possible they're all terrible? The actors are not terrible, it's the director who is terrible."

But how did you know it had to be Brando? He was in his forties at the time, much younger than Don Corleone.

We knew he had to have some sort of charisma, because everyone rotated around The Godfather. His sons adored him, he was powerful with the other Mafia leaders, so we tried and it's difficult. You can't find someone new to play a 65-year-old man. But I came down to thinking, we need one of the true greatest actors in the world. Who are the two greatest actors in the world? One is Laurence Olivier, and one is Marlon Brando. Laurence Olivier was the right age and looked a lot like a Mafia leader, but he was English. The other was Marlon Brando, who was not really



that old, he was 47, and he was also not Italian. But Laurence Olivier just turned us down, he was not well. So that left Marlon Brando. I, of course, just was enamoured. I thought he could do anything. But I was told I couldn't consider him because he was not good for box office: his last picture had been a flop and he was troublesome. Nonetheless, I persisted, and I went and did this little test with him. I didn't say it was a test to him, I said, "Let's improvise," and I was astonished with his ability and intelligence. I think, to this day, Marlon Brando is one of the most brilliant men I have ever met. Aside from acting, just the things he talked about: life and humanity. At any rate, I was able to show that to the same Charlie Bluhdorn who had the Viennese accent. When at first he saw it was Brando on the video he said, "No, no." Then he looked. "That's incredible." It was Bluhdorn who recognised the genius in that little video and then, of course, everyone. I must say, Brando was wonderful to work with. He was the kind of person you didn't talk to about acting. I used to communicate with him with props. If I put a prop near him, he would make use of it. He contributed so much, even in the idea of the orange peel. That scene is *something*, I didn't even know what he was doing.

As a filmmaker at that age and stage of your career, it must have been incredible to work with an actor like that.

I was very close to the actors. Al Pacino, John Cazale, Robert Duvall, James Caan, even Diane Keaton, who never understood why I had cast her. I cast her because she had something. That was a very straight part, sort of boring as written, but I felt that Diane Keaton had a certain wonderful eccentricity about her, which of course you know in her later films blossomed. But I was in good with the actors, they were behind me. The crew thought I was a jerk. "Where'd they find this guy? He knows nothing about directing."

Was that just your age, do you think?

No, it's because crews are a little bit like jocks. If you can throw a football a lot of yards, they admire it, but if you're artistic they think you're a jerk. [And] since I allied more with the actors and less with the technical stuff... A movie crew



Top to bottom: Diane Keaton, as the non-Italian Kay Adams, with college sweetheart and later husband Michael; Vito (Brando) holds court; Michael, next in line to the throne.

in those days, if the lighting guy sees that there's something coming through the window, they'll take an hour-and-a-half-to correct it, but if an actor wants ten minutes to be alone and get in the mood, they make fun of him. What's more important? The actor, or the lights? Well, the actor is, but not if you tell that to a crew member. "Who's this kid? What does he know? He doesn't know anything."

So, whatever the studio may have expected, it was huge, critically and commercially. Can you remember the specific moment you realised just how successful it was?

A little earlier there was someone that I showed the film to, to ask his advice when everyone was cool on the film, no-one was impressed. This was a writer named Bob [Towne], who I looked up to. He was the first one who told me, "Francis, the film was great. Marlon Brando was great." I always heard the picture is too long, it's boring.

So that was the first time I heard there was something a little hopeful. But still when it was coming out, I was very worried. I had no money, I had three kids now and I didn't have a nickel. I was offered to do a fast rewrite of *The Great Gatsby*, which I went off to do, so I wasn't around when *The Godfather* opened. I was talking to my wife, she was in New York, and she said, "Francis, there are lines around the block. Everyone says that *The Godfather* is the biggest hit that ever happened." I said, "Well, that's great, but I've got to figure out how to write this script, I have to turn it in." The one really big success I had, the first *Godfather*, with lines around the block, I didn't enjoy at all because I was so worried about getting this script [finished].

And how did *The Godfather* change your life?

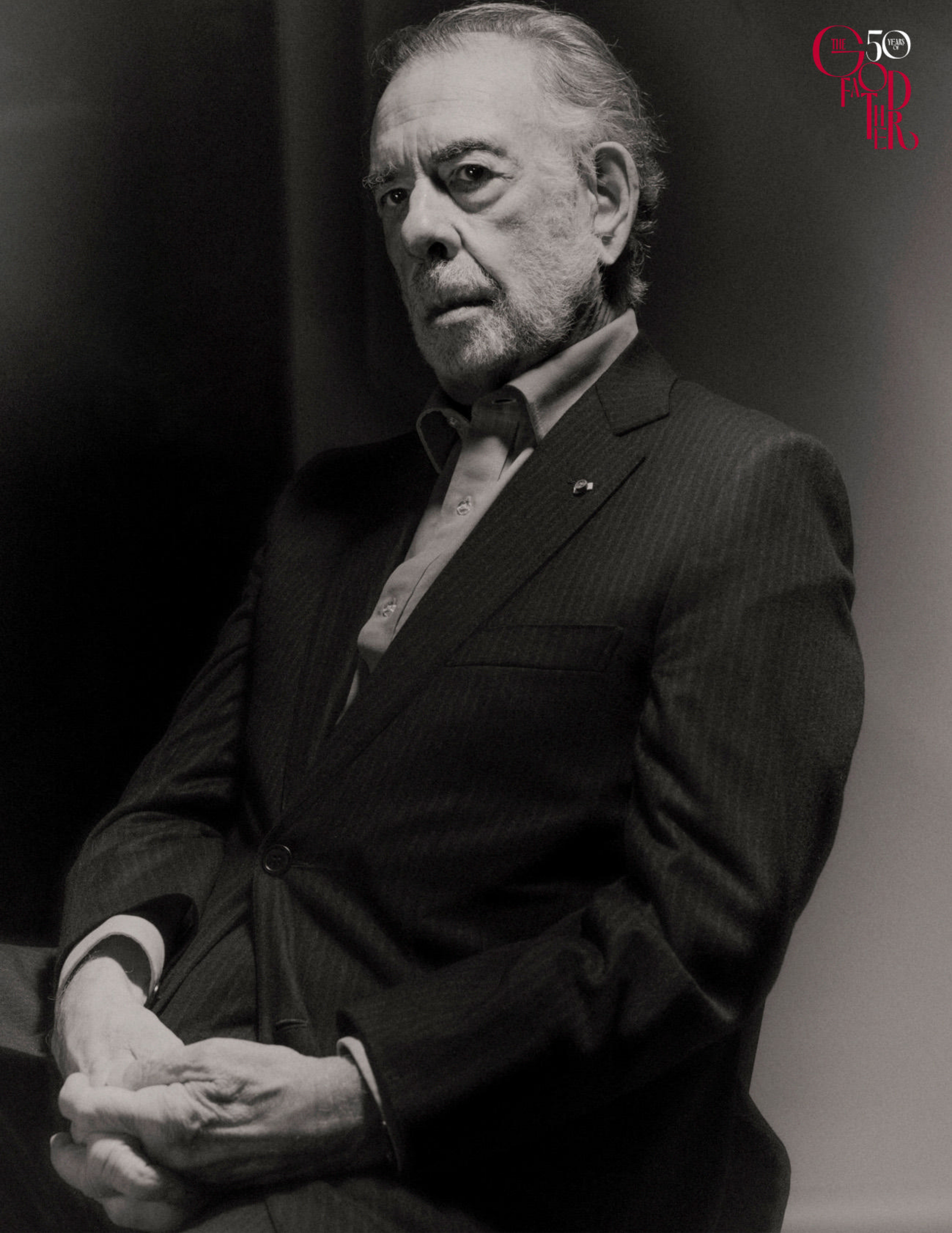
Well, I went from having zero money at all and a family to support, to having several million dollars, which was astonishing. No-one in my family had that kind of money. I went from being unknown and poor with a lot of family responsibilities — I was married young and I loved my kids and my family — to having some money and acclaim. I was famous, everyone knew about *The Godfather* and knew about me. And now people when they hear the name Coppola, they think, "That's a big family." When Sofia started to direct, they said, "Oh, she has the advantages of knowing important people." But originally, I didn't know anybody, I just went to Hollywood as an impoverished student. I used to go without. The reason I got so overweight when I was younger was because I lived on Kraft macaroni-and-cheese dinners, which cost in those days 19 cents. I couldn't afford to go have a girlfriend and take her to a movie. Then suddenly, I was famous. The way I look at it, I always wanted to be one of the group. At first, I was an outsider, and I wasn't included in the group because I was a new kid, or I was poor. Then I became famous, and a success, so I still wasn't one of the group. In my heart, all I ever really wanted was to be considered one of the group, which I am now because when they talk about all the big directors of the '70s, they say George Lucas and Francis Coppola and Marty Scorsese and Steven Spielberg and Brian De Palma and Paul Schrader. So, I have what I want — I am one of the group.

And finally, what part do you think *The Godfather* will play in your legacy as a filmmaker?

I've heard *The Godfather* cited as one of the greatest movies ever made. When you compare me to the great artists of cinema, like G.W. Pabst and Fritz Lang, and the great Murnau, Hitchcock, then the great Italian and Japanese directors — when you *really* view the heroes of cinema, I have to say that I should be considered just a second-rate director. But I'm a first-rate second-rate director. So that's what I leave you with. 🍷

THE REMASTERED 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION OF
THE GODFATHER IS IN CINEMAS FROM 25 FEBRUARY

THE 50 YEARS OF
GODFATHER



THE

A foreboding celebration.
A decapitated horse. And
a monumental bloodbath.
Three of **THE GODFATHER**'s
consigliere remember some
iconic sequences

WORDS CHRISTINA NEWLAND



WATERS



Left: Nice day for a white wedding: Connie (Talia Shire), Fredo (John Cazale), Carlo (Gianni Russo) and Sonny (James Caan).

TALIA SHIRE ON THE WEDDING

TO PLAY THE treasured little sister in a powerful family empire, Talia Shire was well-suited to be Connie Corleone. In her brother Francis Ford Coppola's film, we first meet Shire at Connie's extravagant Italian wedding, which took over three days to film and included 700-plus extras. "Really, I had no business being in the

movie," Shire tells *Empire*. "I just wanted an audition! The Coppolas are a circus family, really. We support each other to do the most creatively dangerous things." Yet despite her relative lack of experience — pre-*Godfather*, she'd only had a few small roles — her performance is by turns wounded, ferocious, endearing and ambiguous.

It is the deeply traditional 1940s, and the only daughter of the Corleone family is getting married to a promising young man named Carlo (Gianni Russo). In these lively scenes of personal drama and joy, women gossiping and men plotting, mamas singing the Tarantella and bridesmaids misbehaving, Coppola brings us into the Corleone

family for the first time.

Shire explains, "There was a lot of pressure. I was a theatre major, and it was exciting, but I was scared to death." Her early-career nerves were eased by the presence of the man playing her father Vito. "Everyone was in awe of Marlon Brando. He was always generous — especially to me. Because I was really awkward. I'd done drama school, but you don't always know where the marks are. And he was very kind."

To prepare his actors for the sequence, "Francis did a little improvisation at a restaurant, where we all ate a meal together. And it was startling to see Brando [without his make-up], >



who was only 46 at the time, and was this incredibly handsome man. But then there he was on set, and it was different. My drama teacher was Stella Adler, who was Brando's teacher too. I called her to ask about working with him, I was so scared. And she told me to remember that the other — your partner — is also yourself. Brando lived by that. The other actor was also himself. So he was deeply concerned about everyone's performance."

When the pair waltz together for the father-daughter dance, the audience sees the glowing happiness of the white-veiled young Connie. "What was important in the character of Connie is that in those scenes she is wildly, madly in love with this guy [Carlo]," Shire says. "And eventually you're going to see something terrible with her husband [his abuse towards her and his eventual set-up of her brother], so you have to set it up. At this point, it's every girl's dream. She's willing to cook this guy a million dinners, because that's what she's learned from her mother. But her father is maybe wondering, 'Is she going to get used by this guy?'"

Eventually, though, Connie does grow to understand some of her father's attitudes towards rough justice. "What interested me about Connie was that she is portrayed really as a victim in the first movie. But you see her transformation in the others," Shire says. "What you have to feel in that character is that she — more and more — justifies the role of her father. And she justifies that there's karma that's taken place. So I understood that. I come from that generation of women who were trying to understand emancipation."

To achieve the vividly textured look of the wedding, with all its colour and subtlety, it took a village. While shooting those complex and crowded scenes, Shire learned to appreciate the skill of cinematographer Gordon Willis. "He was



Top: Johnny Fontane (Al Martino) serenades the bride. **Above:** Dancing with the Don (Marlon Brando).

a master. He could bring the coverage in and bring in dramatic nuances. He was a disciplined man, so you hit the marks. And all of us began to learn the landscape of space we were acting in. After a while, you made sure you hit the mark so the light was on you. Francis and Gordon were collaborating to make this extraordinary landscape."

There were other perks to being the bride at a Corleone wedding. "I just kept eating cake and cannoli every day," Shire laughs. "And I'd never had a big wedding. You know how much your mother wants to see you in the big dress. So thank God — I got to have a big wedding in *The Godfather*!" Beyond that, Shire's trajectory of tragedy and fearsome self-reclamation is one of the film's most perfect arcs. But it all begins with a wedding.

ROBERT DUVALL ON THE HORSE SEQUENCE

A PRIZE RACEHORSE. Silk sheets. Sticky pools of blood.

The terrible power of *The Godfather's* 'horse head' scene all comes, in broader context, from one person: Robert Duvall's Tom Hagen, the consigliere to Brando's Don Vito Corleone. Duvall's trusted adviser is the family's personal lawyer, an adopted 'German-Irish' son who knows he may never ascend the heights of the actual children but makes up for it with an unfailingly calm sense of calculation.

In the film, he is sent to California to 'talk' to Jack Woltz, a Hollywood mogul (an excellent John Marley) about casting a family friend — singer Johnny Fontaine (Al Martino) — in a movie. 'Talking', both at the studio lot and then in an expansive tour of the mogul's lavish estate, doesn't work out, and so Tom Hagen decides to opt for a more — shall we say — *direct* approach. As Hagen says of his boss: "He never asks for a second favour when he's been refused a first."

Robert Duvall is far more plain-speaking than his famously discreet screen counterpart. He loves *The Godfather*, but hasn't seen it in many years. "I knew when we were making it," he says. "It was something special. It was an honour to be a part of it. But I don't always go back and see what I've done." And about the Hollywood moguls that Woltz was rumoured to be based on, he says simply: "I never met any of them; I didn't care to."

When asked how he approached the quiet intensity of Tom Hagen in those scenes, he is just as straightforward. "You just come in and do it," he says. "You talk and listen; listen and talk, you know? Try not to be premeditated; just go with a moment. See what happens."

Woltz monologues angrily at Hagen, who responds only with measured politeness. Duvall says of Hagen's sense of restraint: "He's always secondary, because he's an adopted son. So he has to be aware of that. He's loved, but not definitively beloved. In this family, he can't afford to overplay and get outside of his niche. His niche is to be restrained."

To get in the head of his co-star in the scene, he explains, "These [Hollywood] guys ruled the roost, just like the Mafia guys. And Hollywood can be brutal. Where they run, you have to follow. At least... to a point." Much of the staging is around a too-large dining-room table, but



Coppola did not tell them how to move or react within that space.

"He's smarter than that. He wants to see what you do," says Duvall. "And he accepts what you do. And I think that's why he's such a good director. He lets us find our own reality in the scene, and its own sense of things. Coppola isn't like some of these modern-day directors who just overshoot until they wear the actor down. After one, two, three takes, something often happens. And you leave it alone. You got it. Don't over-intellectualise it."

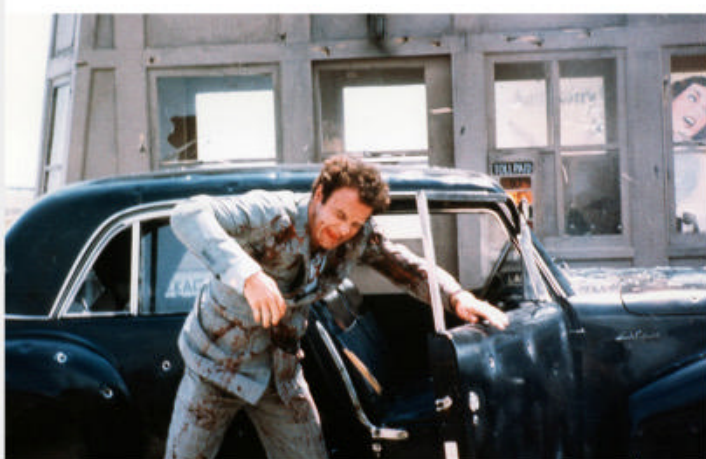
When it came to playing the role of a Mafia consigliere, Duvall was also introduced to a few people who could offer him a crash course. "You can't cantilever your luck with these kinds of people. It's dangerous. They're not saints," he says. "I did observe a guy, who was called [Carmine] Tramunti. He was part of the five families that ran New York. And there was another guy who held his cigarettes, who pulled

out his chair for him. He was like a million-dollar gopher. But it's like the Secret Service, in a way." It helped him to unlock something important about his character: "That was him [Tom Hagen]. That's the way I approached the part. I was like a Secret Service guy for Brando. It's a role some people would look down on, but they wouldn't say it openly."

The terrible and persuasive reach of the Corleone criminal empire is well demonstrated by seeing Tom Hagen go from utter civility to, evidently, ordering a horse's head to be put in someone's bed. And while that might be going a little far, sometimes the real Hollywood moguls tick Robert Duvall off, too. "We gave an opening night party at the St. Regis Hotel. A very well-known director in theatre and movies — who I won't name — came over and said, 'You boys were wonderful in this film. I loved you so much. But I don't know about the film.'"

So, Duvall got the last laugh. "Definitely."

Above: Looking a gift horse in the mouth — Tom Hagen (Robert Duvall) and Jack Woltz (John Marley).
Left: Message received and understood.



Left and here:
There will be blood:
Sonny Corleone
(James Caan)
meets his maker.

JAMES CAAN ON THE TOLLBOOTH MURDER

JAMES CAAN, WITH every nod and gesture, exudes bristling intensity and macho swagger as the Corleone family's eldest brother, Sonny. With his jutting chin and hair-trigger temper, he seems like the obvious heir apparent to his father Vito's Mafia empire.

But Sonny's murder changes the trajectory of the Corleone family forever. Having sped off in a rage to confront his sister Connie's abusive

husband, Sonny arrives at a tollbooth. There, it's a frame-up, and rival gangsters with Tommy guns emerge from the car in front to pepper him with bullet fire. This sequence, shocking at first watch and unforgettable thereafter, is one of the most famous deaths in American movies.

Caan didn't quite know what he was in for that day. "It wasn't until we were on the set, with the tollbooth people, that I realised," he remembers. "I had 147 squibs on my body and then along the side of the car, too. I'm a pretty instinctive person. When you feel those squibs ripping your suit up and ripping the Bondo [filler] out of cars, you pay attention to that. The only thing I could do beforehand was try to rehearse it like a dance."

Apprehensively preparing to do the legendary death-jig of a man riddled with machine-gun fire, Caan says that preparation — in fact, choreography — was the only way to get it done right. "I was rehearsing where to put my arms and legs: step this way, and so on. Like I was dancing for [legendary dance choreographer] Martha Graham or something." Still, a little bit of physical improvisation was okay: "I did that extra little jump when Sonny was on the ground and [a hitman] stands over him and shoots another round into him. I wanted to give it my all."

In terms of the special effects, things were done the old-fashioned way in 1972. "There were these sacks of fake blood covered with gunpowder, in a dish sewn into something or put



onto your skin," Caan explains. "And then when you pull the wire, the other ends were on a sort of scratch-board with nails. So the prop man would run along touching the nails on the board, and each time he made a connection, one would go off: *bam-bam-bam-bam*," he says, imitating the percussive sound of bullet-fire. Did it hurt? "Well, if you put your hand in front of it, it would literally blow a little hole in your hand."

A touch of danger has never been totally alien to James Caan, growing up in a working-class Bronx neighbourhood. "We didn't have any bullets," he says. "But we had sharpened buckles and cue-balls in socks. I was king of my block, because I was smart enough to realise if you were chief, you didn't have to do too much of that stuff.

So I made them believe I was the chief."

Caan's honest-to-goodness street-smarts shine through as he talks about his experience creating the brash criminality of Sonny Corleone. "Francis never talked to me about it, because I knew myself that I was [playing] this kind of ticking time-bomb," he says. "But [comedian] Don Rickles was a friend of mine, and one day I was just at home shaving and was like: 'That's him. From now on, you're from Pittsburgh and you're busting everyone's chops from morning to night.'"

With half a century of hindsight, Caan can get away with being flippant about being a pivotal part of one of the greatest American films ever made. His reaction to seeing his extravagantly violent on-screen death for the first time, he says,

was: "Well, there go my residuals." His dry sense of street humour makes it obvious why he was such a great Sonny to begin with.

"If there weren't a bunch of girls on set that day, I probably wouldn't have done it — it was scary," he says. "But since there were girls there, I couldn't mess with my future plans to go out that evening." So the famous scene was only done in one take? "Hell, yeah. The prop guy was putting the squibs in and getting me ready for the shot, and I remember looking and seeing him connect all these things up. He says to me, 'I don't think I've ever put so many squibs on one person before.'" Caan recalls his wry, nervous reply: "Thanks, but I don't think there is any need for that goddamn conversation!" **E**



1 THE MAKE-UP

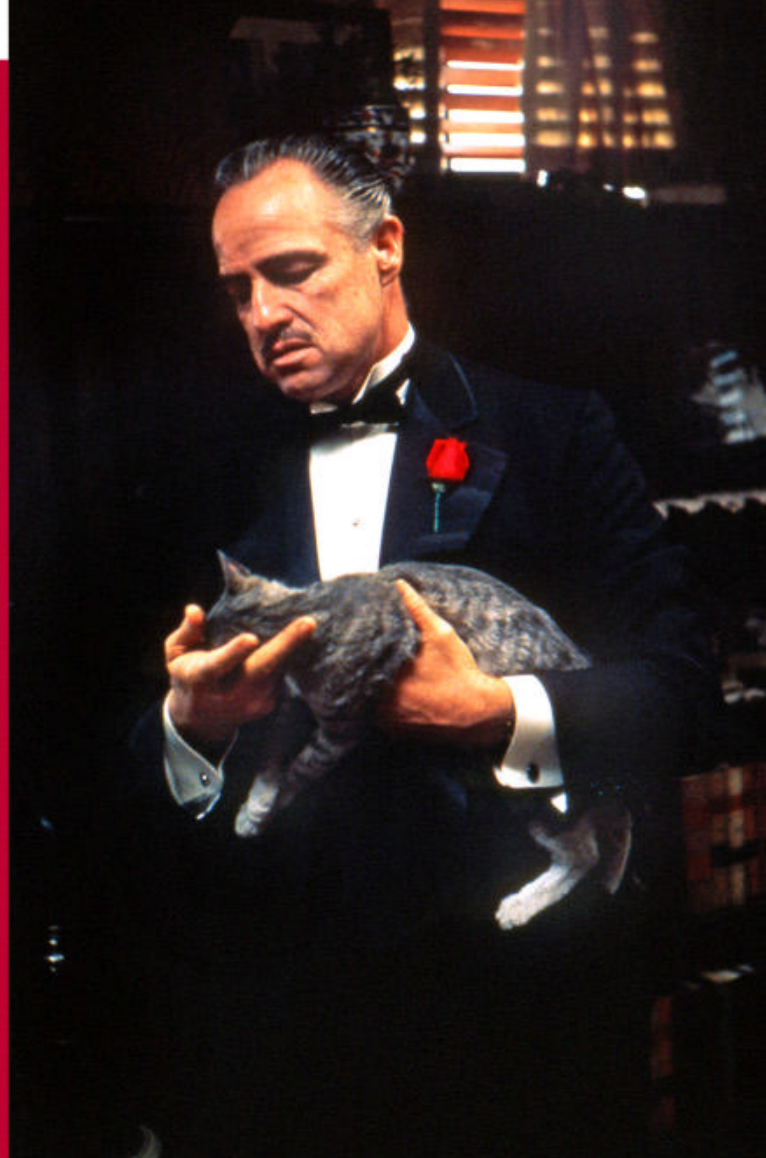
Paramount didn't want Brando for the film, but Coppola was hellbent on him, and got what he wanted by shooting a test. "Marlon put cotton in his cheeks and did this transformation into kind of what we see in the movie," remembers associate producer Gray Frederickson. "Then Dick Smith, the make-up guy, was commissioned to make him look like he did in that test. They made little implants for him, to push his cheeks out." They also needed to make Brando — then 47 — look 20 years older. "Marlon was technically too young for the role of the Don, a man well into his sixties, so he had to be aged," says casting director Fred Roos. "Dick Smith was the best make-up man in the business for this."

He mumbled, he mooned... and he gave one of Hollywood's most memorable performances. Here, *The Godfather's* associate producer and casting director remember how **MARLON BRANDO** brought the Don to life

CREATING

2 THE CAT

For Don Corleone's introductory sequence, Brando strokes a cat sitting on his lap in his office, bringing a surreal and somewhat sinister air to proceedings. Yet that was never the plan. "This was a lucky happenstance," says Roos. "In preparing to shoot the 'I believe in America' scene, an old cat wandered onto the set. Francis picked it up and put it into Marlon's lap, no explanation or discussion. Marlon just went with it and used it as a subtle prop." In other ways, the cat was less helpful. "The first time the studio saw those dailies, they had a hard time understanding Marlon — he was mumbling because of the implants in his mouth, and the cat was purring right into the radio mic," laughs Frederickson. The purrs were purged in post-production.



3 THE WEDDING SINGER

Don Corleone has, as Michael (Al Pacino) says, aggressively helped his godson, singer Johnny Fontane (Al Martino), with his career, by giving a band leader an offer he couldn't refuse. In Corleone's office during his daughter's wedding party, a pathetic Fontane asks for some help; an impatient Corleone shouts at him, slaps him in the face and reprimands him for crying "like a woman". The physical altercation was unscripted. "Marlon was very frustrated with Al Martino, because Al Martino was not an actor," says Frederickson of the singer playing a singer. "Marlon got so angry — that bit where he shakes him and says, 'Act like a man!', Marlon really felt that way. That was him expressing his frustration with Al. And Al was never happy, he was always complaining. He felt that he was not respected on the movie. Marlon did not respect Al." >

WORDS
ALEX GODFREY

CORLEONE

4 THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

Early on in *The Godfather*, Don Corleone is ruthlessly gunned down outside a grocery while buying some fruit (beware of those oranges), sending him barrelling across the street. It's a sudden, shocking scene which ends with Brando lifelessly tumbling off his car bonnet and onto the ground while his son Fredo (John Cazale) weeps. It's spritely work from Brando. "Marlon actually fell, that was him," remembers Frederickson. "No stunt guy did that. He fell onto a mattress, which we cut away from, but yeah, that's him. He was in great shape! My gosh. He was in his forties, and he worked out. It was frustrating, because Marlon showed up on the set like that, in the best shape he'd ever been in. He was trim and thin, washboard stomach. So we had to pad him out. Then, on *Apocalypse Now*, when we needed him to be in great shape, he showed up weighing 350lb!"



5 THE RECOVERY

Having pulled through, Don Corleone returns home to recuperate. Brando, on the other hand, was up to some monkey business. "When he's brought home from hospital, they took a couple of extras and had them dressed up like orderlies, who were supposed to carry him on that gurney up the stairs to his bedroom," says Frederickson. "And Marlon grabbed a bunch of camera weights off the camera dolly and put them on the bed, so it weighed about 500lb, and they couldn't lift it! They couldn't carry it, so they had to get some grips to come and help." It was typical Brando behaviour. "Marlon was always playing pranks," continues Frederickson. "He and Jimmy Gaan were always mooning in the cars at other cars, putting their butts up against the window. They had mooning contests. And then at the wedding sequence, Marlon mooned the whole wedding crowd." Cheeky blighter.





6 THE DIRECTOR

Brando's career wasn't at its peak when Coppola cast him, but he cut a towering, daunting presence. "The actors were all in awe of Marlon," says Roos. "He was the gold standard for acting as these actors were studying their craft and breaking in. To put them at ease with Marlon, Francis set up an Italian dinner before shooting began. And Marlon put them all at ease as he showed himself to be totally

accessible and actually a fun, playful guy." Brando enjoyed a fruitful relationship with Coppola, "who had a lot to do with Marlon's performance, but hey: Marlon's Marlon Brando," says Frederickson, who remembers the actor's time with Coppola as not always being so great; certainly Brando's habit of not learning the script posed challenges. "We had to tape his lines onto people's foreheads," says Frederickson.



7 THE HEART ATTACK

Don Corleone's death scene, as he has a heart attack while playing with Michael's son Anthony, is quiet and upsetting, all the more powerful for its grace. As usual, Brando was having fun. The moment in which Corleone makes fangs out of bits of orange peel was his invention. "That was an ad-lib thing he came up with," says Frederickson. Brando told Coppola that he did that when he was playing with kids, and that it might illicit a more authentic performance from the boy. It worked too well. "He scared the kid to death! He felt bad and grabbed the kid and said, 'I'm sorry!'", says Frederickson. And it was inadvertently brilliant. "His intention was playful," says Roos, "but when the child cried and ran from him, we get a subtext about Marlon's Don: a sweet old gentleman, but at the same time, a monster." ●



THE 50 YEARS OF
GODFATHER

GODSON

THE

In just five films over six years,
the late, great John Cazale —
The Godfather's tragic Fredo — would
make an impression like no other.
We salute cinema's lost hero

WORDS ADAM SMITH

W

WHEN JOHN CAZALE died, in 1978, the *New York Times* marked his passing with a seven-paragraph obituary. It noted his training at Boston University, his background in regional and then off-Broadway theatre, and his short film career. It glancingly noted that he had appeared in a minor role in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*. It was a modest notice, and at the time it likely seemed appropriate. After all, his was a name none but the most dedicated of cinephiles would have known; a promising character actor, maybe, but one among dozens.

But in the four decades that have passed since his death, it has started to look hopelessly inadequate. Cazale's reputation, and the sense of an inestimable loss, has done nothing but grow. There are those five films for a start: *The Godfather*, *The Conversation*, *The Godfather Part II*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *The Deer Hunter*. Five of the foundational films of the decade that would become celebrated as American cinema's second Golden Age. Between them, they harvested 40 Academy Award nominations, launched a dozen stellar careers, and became the touchstone movies for a generation of both actors and movie-goers.

And, the more you look at them, the more it becomes apparent that even surrounded by the titans of the era — De Niro, Pacino, Streep, Hackman, Brando, Duvall, Keaton, Walken — Cazale is almost always doing something special, something utterly distinctive, something to which your eye is irresistibly drawn. He is always as good as anyone he's on screen next to. More than sometimes, he is the best thing up there.

"There was something unique about him," director Richard Shepard (*The Matador*/*Dom Hemingway*), whose documentary *I Knew It Was You* remains the definitive work on Cazale's life, tells *Empire*. "He was an actors' actor. He could take a small role and find this depth in it, which doesn't steal the scene from the other actor but gives it a weight you didn't imagine was there. He's one of these actors who you can look at, just a freeze-frame of him, just his eyes, and you're so deeply drawn in."

But despite his ever-strengthening reputation amongst the cognoscenti, Cazale remains a kind of enigma, a genius frozen forever in the early, most thrilling portion of his career. He never became a star. He wasn't given the time.

There are no chat-show interviews, magazine profiles or admiring biographies. In an almost uncanny way, he is absent from the cultural ballyhoo surrounding the decade, the web of anecdotes polished to within an inch of their lives. "I think if he had lived he would have had been the go-to actor for all the lead roles by the great indie directors," says Shepard. "There's no doubt Tarantino would have cast him."

But it wasn't to be. All we have of John Cazale, probably less than a couple of hours in total, is up there, on screen.

And it's dazzling.

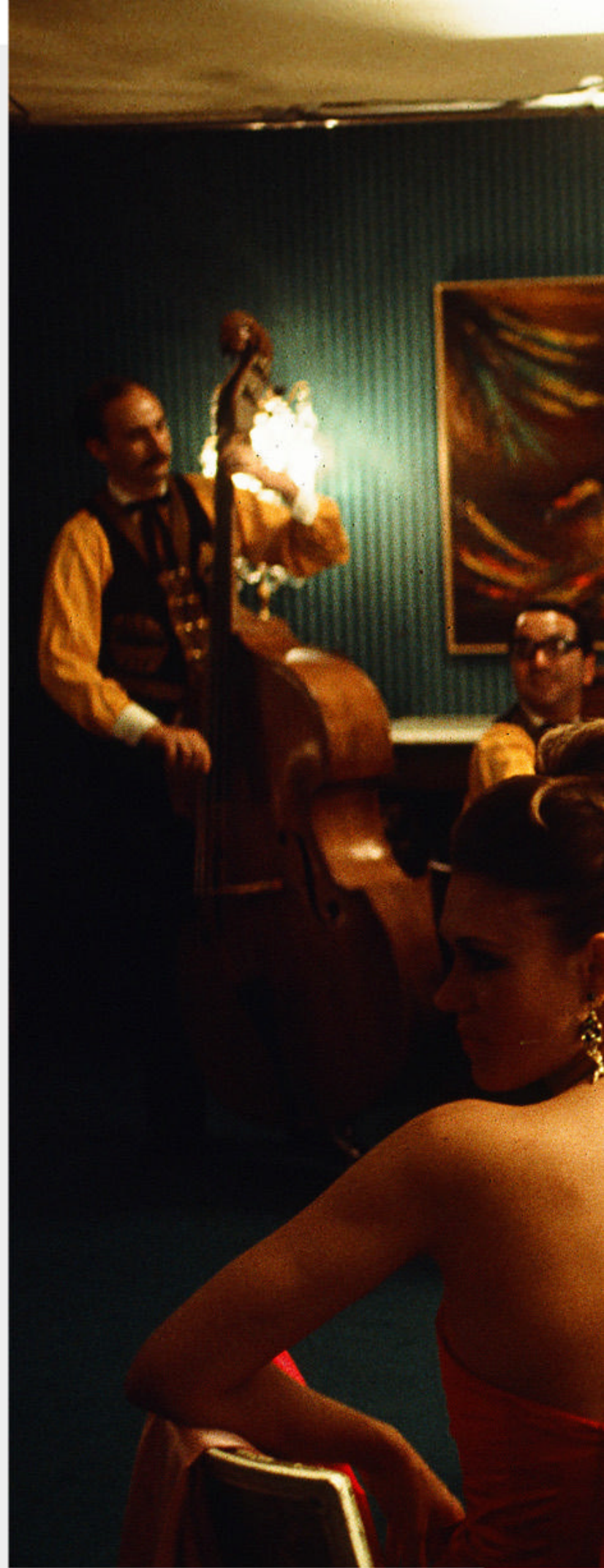
"I LEARNED MORE ABOUT ACTING from John than I did from anyone else," Al Pacino said after Cazale's death. "And all I wanted to do was act with him for the rest of my life."

The two had met in the early 1960s when both were filling time between auditions working as messengers at Standard Oil, running memos like human email through the corridors of the industrial giant. Cazale had arrived in New York from the University of Boston where he'd studied under the legendary Peter Kass, a ferocious devotee of the Method, of forcing his students to confront and mine their psychological interiors, their weaknesses and secrets. Cazale had been born the middle child of three in Revere, Massachusetts. His father, a salesman, was absent from the household for long periods of time. There is a feeling among Cazale's friends that his childhood was unhappy in some profound way, that it provided a dark lightning-rod that he could touch and in doing so conjure the wounded, vulnerable characters that become his most powerful artistic ammunition.

In Cazale, Pacino found a kindred spirit. "I think they were young and it was a bit like being in a band," says Shepard. "I mean Lennon and McCartney: they're both brilliant on their own, but together they explode. It was the same with Pacino and Cazale. They elevated each other. Pacino did his finest, subtlest acting during that period. And he did it with Cazale."

But it was another of the decade's luminaries, Richard Dreyfuss, who ushered in Cazale's first film role. *The Godfather's* casting director Fred Roos had cast Dreyfuss in George Lucas' *American Graffiti*, and in 1971, acting on a tip-off from his friend, attended a Dreyfuss-starring revival of Israel Horowitz's play *Line*, then playing in New York. "Richard was terrific but there was this guy John Cazale," remembered Roos. "It was like, 'There's Fredo, end of story.' I told Francis, 'I saw Fredo last night and we don't have to look any longer.'" Cazale flew to LA to meet with Coppola, who agreed. Fredo, Michael Corleone's poor, doomed brother, would be played by newcomer John Cazale.

They say great chefs judge each other by their scrambled eggs. It should be the same with actors and playing drunk. Almost every actor slurs and stumbles their way through a boozy scene at some point in their career. The results generally range from the intentionally funny through to





Clockwise from above: Cazale as Fredo (second from right) in *The Godfather*; Weeping over father Vito (Marlon Brando); Alongside Al Pacino, Brando and James Caan; Fredo in sequel *The Godfather Part II*.

the overwrought: the embarrassing, ‘Shyore my bess fren’ pantomime is often not far away. But the first time the world saw John Cazale, in the opening minutes of *The Godfather*, he delivers a masterclass. This isn’t John Cazale playing drunk: this is Fredo, drunk. His hazy smile, slightly woozy affect, the perfectly judged ear-scratch, the sense of a slightly beatific soul drifting through life — it’s all there in less than a minute or so of screen-time.

That supernaturally calibrated judgement manifests again in the tiny scene when Fredo offers to drive Don Corleone. A slight pre-pubescent counter-tenor creeps into his voice — “I don’t mind driving you, pa.” Suddenly he’s a ten-year-old boy, desperately trying to please his oblivious father. It’s there in the scene when Michael arrives in Las Vegas to a raucous welcome organised by his brother, Michael telling him to send the band and the hookers home. *From behind shades* Cazale radiates a cocktail of emotion: bruised pride, anger, resentment, humiliation. He may only be on screen for a matter of minutes in *The Godfather*, and in only a handful of scenes, but there isn’t a wasted nanosecond. “The key is he was willing to play weak,” says Richard Shepard. “Actors often play weak, but there’s this, ‘What a great actor here I am, playing weak,’ about it. Cazale didn’t need that. He didn’t need to remind anyone who he was, or ever show his cards.”

An impressed Coppola spotted the possibilities. He cast him in *The Conversation* in the role of Stan, paranoid surveillance expert and Harry Caul’s (Gene Hackman) assistant. “Coppola was so savvy,” says Shepard. “On paper it’s this nothing role, so Coppola says, ‘Let’s bring in an actor who will just elevate it.’” And by the time *The Godfather Part II* began shooting at Lake Tahoe, Fredo had become the second-most vital character to the unfolding tragedy.

In the unforgettable boathouse scene, when confronted by Michael, he finally breaks down, and Cazale delivers what might be the greatest work of his short career. “It’s incredibly simply shot,” says Shepard. “But it’s stunning. Pacino is quiet, really perfect. And I think it was because he was acting against John, who refused to let any bullshit into the scene. He was just this bullshit-detector, so Pacino couldn’t use any of his normal tricks, or go big. But by the end Cazale just vanishes into that chair, he’s fucked. Utterly trapped.”

“I remember being crammed into that boathouse,” set photographer Bruce McBroom, who snapped most of the now-iconic shots from the movie, tells *Empire*. “The thing about John, and all those guys really, was that they were incredibly serious about the work. They almost never broke character. John seemed like a gentle soul, but strangely I don’t know if he was because I think I was just meeting Fredo.”

Until that confrontation, Coppola’s trilogy had been a story powered by Michael Corleone’s rise. But in that few minutes, transformed by Cazale’s wrenching performance, it reveals



Top to Bottom:
Cazale (right) as steel worker Stan in *The Deer Hunter*; With on-screen brother Al Pacino in *The Godfather*; In Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Conversation*; With then partner Meryl Streep in 1976.

itself to be a film as intrinsically about Fredo Corleone’s fall. He creeps into our consciousness in the first film, becomes the tragic focus of the second, and haunts the third, an unquiet ghost. Working with only a few minutes of screen-time, Cazale, like a master alchemist, moves Coppola’s epic from the realm of laser-polished melodrama to that of authentic tragedy.

IN 1976 CAZALE TOLD Pacino that he had just met the greatest actress in the history of the world. Pacino was sceptical. His old friend seemed always to be surrounded by women. “But then, you know, she turned out to be Meryl Streep, so he was right,” he later said.

The pair had met while performing together in *Measure For Measure* in Central Park, and they rapidly became a kind of underground power couple among New York’s acting crowd. The dinner parties, hosted at the couple’s Tribeca loft, became famous and stretched on well into the early hours. “You’d be done, finished, washed, in bed and John would be halfway through his meal,” Pacino remembered. “And then would come the cigars. He’d look at it, taste it, then *finally* smoke it.”

For Streep, Cazale was both a kindred spirit and a kind of driving force. “He wasn’t like anybody I had ever met,” she told Shepard. “It was the specificity of him, his sort of humanity and curiosity about people.” His relentless

compulsion to get deeper into a character, to explore all the facets of even the smallest moment, both impressed and challenged her. “He was monomaniacal about the work. I was more glib, ready to pick the first idea that came to me. He would say, ‘There’s a lot of other possibilities.’ That was a real lesson.”

Things were going well for Cazale professionally as well. In 1975 he had starred opposite Pacino in Sidney Lumet’s *Dog Day Afternoon*, a true second lead and the most substantial screen role he had landed thus far. Lumet had not even considered Cazale for the role of Sal, bank-robber Sonny’s boyfriend, who screenwriter Frank Pierson had described as “a 15-year-old Botticelli angel” until Pacino insisted he see him.

“He came in and I was so discouraged,” recalled Lumet. “I thought Al was out of his mind. He couldn’t have looked wrong. This guy looks 31, 32. It’s the last thing I wanted for the part. Then he read for it and my heart just broke. I think he read two sentences and I stopped him and I said, ‘It’s yours.’”

Cazale’s career looked like it was gaining traction. Reviews for his performance as Sal were stellar. It seemed this would be the movie that would move him into the mainstream.

Then, in April 1977 during a production of *Agamemnon* at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre, he suddenly became ill. The diagnosis was lung cancer that had metastasised to his bones. The



THE 50 YEARS OF
GODFATHER

Left, top to bottom:
Pre-Vietnam wedding
bells in *The Deer
Hunter*; As bank-
robber Sal in *Dog Day
Afternoon*; With
Coppola on set of *The
Godfather Part II*.



hunts being filmed in near 90-degree heat. Cazale ploughed through the work, crystallising the familiar little gems out of unpromising material.

On paper, Stan is not much more than a small-town yahoo, but in tiny moments Cazale fills him out. There he is adjusting his bowtie in a windshield reflection ("Perfect," he murmurs). There's a little glance to a bridesmaid and an immediate checking of his fly during the wedding sequence. In a movie that foregrounds big Oscar-bait performances, it's Cazale's subtle, coruscating moments that stick in the memory long after the overwrought Vietnam sequences have faded.

But John Cazale would not live to see *The Deer Hunter*'s release. At Sloan Kettering Hospital, in the early hours of 13 March 1978, and with Streep by his side, he passed away. He was 42 years old. His film career had lasted just six years.

"IT'S SO WRENCHINGLY SAD. He had so much work to do," says Shepard. "It's this deep tragedy that he died so young. But look, he was this *comet*. He somehow managed to work with the greatest talents of the generation in the greatest movies of his era. He was the partner of the greatest actress, the best friend of the greatest actor. But film is such an amazing thing. We have those five movies. Captured. He lives and breathes in them."

In those indelible performances, John Cazale embodies the sense of optimism, of promise and excitement that electrified American cinema during the 1970s, freezing it in time. Distilling his mercurial talent in a soundbite is almost impossible. But Sidney Lumet probably got closest. "He had this ability to conjure a whole person in the reaction to one moment," he said. And when you think of him now, it's in those incandescent, fleeting instants that he lives: as Stan shrugging to Gene Hackman, wordlessly acknowledging his betrayal; fumbling the gun as Brando is gunned down; as Sal, the hapless bank robber announcing the country he'd like to escape to is 'Wyoming' in *Dog Day Afternoon*. And finally collapsing into that chair in the Corleone boathouse, a spent, broken, ruined man. He gave us a constellation of brilliant, enduring moments. And then like poor, doomed Fredo, still surely one of the most unforgettable creations in all of cinema, he went and broke our hearts. **E**

prognosis was poor.

Cazale had signed on to Michael Cimino's Vietnam epic *The Deer Hunter* shortly after his diagnosis, perhaps an attempt to retain some sense of normality. Robert De Niro had originally suggested him to Cimino for the role of Stan, one of the group of young steelworkers whose lives are interrupted by the war. Cazale had remained slightly diffident about film, but De Niro was keen to work with him. Streep, meanwhile, signed on to play Linda, a part she dismissed as "just a vague, stock girlfriend", primarily to look after Cazale during the shoot. Pacino also pitched in, regularly ferrying him to his frequent radiotherapy appointments.

As the start date approached, Universal/EMI got wind of Cazale's condition and threatened to pull the plug. Given his prognosis, he would be impossible to insure. "It was hell. Shooting had already been delayed," Cimino later said. "I bluntly told the company that we were going to start shooting [with Cazale] and they said that unless I got rid of John they would shut down the picture. The only alternative, they said, was to write another script that excluded John's character completely. I said, 'Go ahead, shut it down,' and slammed down the phone."

De Niro put up the insurance bond himself, while Cimino rejigged the production schedule. Cazale's scenes would be shot first, the sequences in the mountains during the initial and final





This woman is...

SAD ☒, ROMANTIC ☒,

MESSY , INCREDIBLE , FUNCTIONING 

In **THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD**, director Joachim Trier tackles love, life, sex, drugs, death and everything in-between. He and lead actor Renate Reinsve tell us how they turned the romcom on its head WORDS STEVE ROSE

“The day after the premiere, I woke up and I puked and cried,”

says *The Worst Person In The World*'s lead actor Renate Reinsve. This was at last year's Cannes Film Festival. “I was very scared to show the movie for the first time in front of 2,500 people. I was very self-critical. I thought, ‘Okay, the film is perfect, but I ruined the whole thing.’”

The Cannes jury disagreed: Reinsve won the Best Actress award. The critics also disagreed, showering the 34-year-old actor with “a star is born” levels of praise. The Norwegian Oscar Committee also disagreed: *The Worst Person In The World* is the country's submission for the Best International Feature Oscar this year. Despite its highly specific focus, the film seems to have struck a chord with everyone who has seen it.

The Worst Person In The World has been described as a “romantic comedy”, although that doesn't completely do it justice. It is both hilarious and beguilingly romantic at times, but in step with Reinsve's heroine, Julie, it is also messy, complicated and unpredictable. Closer to real life, you might say, except the story also takes some wild departures from reality, not least a bonkers, semi-animated magic-mushroom trip (which somehow culminates with Julie removing her tampon, smearing her face with blood, then throwing it at her father). There is also a gorgeous, literally show-stopping scene where time freezes and everyone in the city is reduced to statues. At the same time, the film is unafraid to get into the tangled weeds of human existence, addressing eternal themes of regret, guilt and mortality. It's not this or that, it's this *and* that. Director and co-writer Joachim Trier calls it “a film for grown-ups who still feel like they don't know how to grow up.” Isn't that all of us?

Reinsve holds the film together, which is no mean feat since Julie's chief character-trait is her inconsistency. Within the opening minutes, she has switched from studying medicine to psychology to photography to working in a bookstore, with accompanying changes of hairstyle, outfit and boyfriend for each. Over the subsequent 12 chapters, spanning four years of Julie's life, she scrolls through a carousel of identities, and falls deeply in and out of love with two



This page,
top to bottom:
Smokin': Medical student Julie (Renate Reinsve) with the charming Eivind (Herbert Nordrum); Racing through the streets as time stands still; A thoughtful moment overlooking Oslo.





different men. “I love you, and I don’t love you,” she tells one of them, cryptically. She doesn’t know what she wants, so she proceeds almost by a process of elimination, stumbling into experiences, realising what she *doesn’t* want and messily moving on. She’s not really the worst person in the world. No more than the rest of us.

“I don’t think characters in films need to be idealised or perfect,” says Trier from his Oslo apartment. “They should be flawed human beings. That’s what I’m curious about.”

T

RIER AND REINSVE FIRST MET OVER

ten years ago, when he was casting for his second feature, *Oslo, August 31st*. His 2006 debut, *Reprise*, an intense tale of two young writers (Anders Danielsen Lie and Espen Klouman Høiner) trying to make it in Oslo’s

literary scene, was well received internationally; Norway is not a big place, so competition for roles in Trier’s next movie was intense. There was just one problem: Reinsve, who was in her first year at acting school at the time, had no idea how to make an audition video.

“I’d never done it before,” she explains. “I came home and I just put on the camera. And then I lost something, and it was very messy and weird. And I didn’t think I was going to get it anyway so I didn’t really put in any effort. And then I didn’t know how to send it so I just put it on YouTube and sent them the link. It’s still on YouTube. I haven’t managed to take it off.”

It was enough. Reinsve gets a fair amount of screen time in *Oslo, August 31st* — a traumatic day-in-the-life of a recovering addict (Lie again). But she has just one line. “It was, ‘Let’s go to the party,’” she recalls proudly, adding that she snuck in a second, improvised line, when she jumps in a swimming pool and says, ‘Ooh. I got water in my nose!’”

Trier’s intimate, freeform mode of filmmaking kind of spoiled her, says Reinsve: “I was like, ‘Wow, is this what it’s supposed to be like to be working on a movie?’ Because it was so easy. We were just a group of friends, being on set, having so much fun. And then the next movie I was in, I was so shocked, because it was completely different. It was not free at all.” All too often, the roles were two-dimensional characters in conventional, plot-driven stories.

Trier was also concerned by the way Reinsve’s career was panning out. “I expected her to get big roles. She didn’t,” he says. “In theatre she did, but not in television or film. It’s a delicate thing to talk about, but I think it’s important to address that someone like Renate, who is so gifted dramatically as an actor, but also a very beautiful young woman, can easily get cast in roles that don’t show the three-dimensionality of her talent. I was thinking, ‘Damn! Someone needs to give her a central role. She can carry a film!’”

It took Trier a while to realise that “someone” was him. After *Oslo, August 31st*, which was even better received than *Reprise*, he headed to New York to make *Louder Than Bombs*, an angst-ridden, English-language drama led by Isabelle Huppert, Gabriel Byrne and Jesse Eisenberg. Trier seemed primed to escape Norway’s small pond and go global, but the film received mixed reviews and struggled to find an audience. “I made *Oslo, August 31st* and that became a discovery, and many people wanted me to repeat it,” he explains.

In 2017 he returned to Norway for *Thelma*, an intense paranormal horror, somewhere in the ballpark of, say, *Carrie* or *Let The Right One In*. It was a labour-intensive film to make, he says, including 200 CG shots. “It took a lot out of me in terms of creative energy. And then I felt the need to go back to my roots of more playful, process-oriented cinema, where I leave the door open for the performance to go to unexpected places.” It wasn’t planned as such, but along with *Reprise* and *Oslo, August 31st*, *The Worst Person...* completes what has become known as Trier’s ‘Oslo Trilogy’.



Above: Reinsve, Nordrum and director Joachim Trier plan a scene. **Right:** Reinsve on the move.



Reinsve was always the best person in the world to lead the film; Trier and his writing partner Eskil Vogt wrote the script with her in mind. She can barely remember how she felt when Trier offered her the part: “My brain just shut down because it was so shocking to hear. I couldn’t really believe him that he wanted me to play the lead,” she laughs. “It’s so weird, because the day before Joachim called me, I had made the choice of quitting [acting]. I wanted to study carpentry.” As the movie itself suggests, so much of what happens in life just comes down to timing.

L

LIKE ALL GREAT ROMANTIC MOVIES, *The Worst Person In The World* interrogates the nature of romance itself. The question of what is considered ‘cheating’, for example, is playfully explored over an evening of flirtation between Julie and a charming stranger

(Herbert Nordrum). Both of them are technically with other partners, so what constitutes a betrayal? Dancing? Biting? Smelling each other? Going to the toilet in front of each other?

Romantic uncertainties abound. How do we know it’s the real thing? How do we know we made the right choice? Do we settle for what we have or gamble for something better? Are we ready to have children? And how is romance even possible in the digital age, when all options are apparently available? One lifetime is not enough — hence Julie’s will to freeze time and put one relationship on pause while she explores another.

In a brief aside, Julie looks back at portraits of her female ancestors. By the time they were 30, they had careers, were mothers, were widowed, or were already dead. Reinsve calls it “the paradox of choices”: Julie has opportunities these women never dreamed of, yet she is overwhelmed. “We’re surrounded with so much information and so many choices, and it actually makes people quite restless and unhappy,” says Reinsve. If your choices are limited, she suggests, “You could actually be more happy.”

The irony is not lost on Trier that this defiantly self-determining female character was written by two middle-aged men. *The Worst Person In The World* tackles these gender and generational issues head-on. Julie’s older boyfriend Aksel (Lie, again) is a kind of alter-ego, Trier admits. A successful comic-book writer in his mid-forties, Aksel receives a very 21st-century comeuppance when he is taken to task by a young feminist on a radio show for the crude and sexist nature of his work (think a Norwegian version of Gilbert Shelton’s *Fat Freddy’s Cat*). He defends himself unconvincingly.

By a similar token, trying on her “firebrand writer” persona, Julie composes a filthy, politically incorrect essay on blow-jobs, titled ‘Oral Sex In The Age Of #MeToo’. It becomes a viral sensation online, we are told. Is it problematic that the essay was actually scripted by two men? “Many, many women who’ve seen the film really enjoyed that,” laughs Trier. “I live in a Scandinavian environment with people that are psychologists and artists, and we talk a lot: men, women, all genders. I thought it was fun that Julie, in her own provocative way, tries to carve out her own sense of the paradoxes of sexual negotiations at a time when everyone is so cautious. That’s kind of her punk move.”

Trier is no stranger to punk: he was a teenage skater at a time when skateboarding was literally *illegal* in Norway. He is no stranger to gender politics either. As a film student he attended seminars by renowned film theorist Laura Mulvey, who first criticised the inherently masculine, voyeuristic gaze of classical cinema, and the gender power asymmetry behind it. If anything, the gaze here is in the other direction. There is only one instance of full nudity in the film, for example, and it is male. Nor does Trier fall into the ‘manic pixie dream girl’ trap of making Julie a free-spirited fantasy object who inspires the male characters. If anything, it’s the other way round.



This page, top to bottom:
A pensive Julie with boyfriend Aksel (Anders Danielsen Lie); Turning 30; Having a moment.





In general, though, Trier and Vogt got it right, says Reinsve: “I was overwhelmed by how accurate their portrayal of a woman today was. Or a *human being* today. They don’t write a gender, they write a complex person, and then a part of her identity is being a woman.”

IF THERE’S A COMMON THREAD TO Trier’s Oslo Trilogy, aside from the city itself and the presence of Lie (Trier calls him “the Norwegian Daniel Day-Lewis”), it is the question of what it means to be alive. Themes of angst, anxiety and mental torment in his work are difficult to ignore. Reinsve, describing her random social encounters with Trier over the years, says, “We would always end up having these big, existential conversations.”

The word “existential” comes up a lot with Trier; he overuses it himself, he confesses. “It’s a shorthand for talking about the ongoing subject of time passing very quickly, and me being an atheist and thinking I’m going to disappear, and trying to negotiate my acceptance of my mortality. That probably sounds a bit Scandinavian in the worst sense of the word,” he laughs, “but I think I’ve gotten better.” Having said that, just before *The Worst Person...*, in what could be a moment of peak Norwegianness, Trier directed a documentary following author Karl Ove Knausgaard curating an exhibition of Edvard Munch.

The stereotype of the gloomy, depressive, Nordic sensibility fits him pretty well, Trier acknowledges, as he points his laptop camera out of the window onto a night-time Oslo scene. It is not yet four in the afternoon. “Norway in the wintertime is a pretty dark, serious place, to be honest with you,” he says. But this is only half the story: “We really have tough winters, but we really have joyful springs. Should we say that Norway is, by nature, a bipolar country to live in?”

As with many of Munch’s paintings, ‘The Scream’ aside, Trier’s cinema is infused with the golden glow of Norway’s miraculous summer light. Much of *The Worst Person In The World* unfolds over such endless summer nights, when it feels as if the whole city is awake, feasting, partying, engaging in erudite conversations about oral sex. “It’s all about the light and the nature,” says Reinsve. “In the summer you only have two hours of darkness. When you’re drunk, walking home with your friends and you’re surrounded by trees and the sun is coming up, that’s very special for Norway.” It sounds... romantic?

Trier’s brand of cinema is equally “bipolar”, he ventures. He takes pride in the fact that a Swedish newspaper recently described him as Norway’s happiest melancholic. “I grew up with one foot in the camp of Antonioni, Tarkovsky and Bergman and one foot looking at, say, Brian De Palma.” *The Worst Person...*’s time-freezing scene was inspired by *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, he says.

Trier’s films are never a chore. They are tirelessly energetic, fast-moving, packed with allusions and detours, and more intensively constructed than they first appear in terms of sounds, visuals and editing. In the constrained and competitive landscape of modern cinema, he seems to have found a fertile little patch of middle ground.

The Worst Person In The World is no exception, he says. “On the one hand, I wanted to do George Cukor and *Notting Hill*, or something. I love the sweet romanticism of that. And the other part of me wants to smuggle a little Bergman in there... to talk about grief and the passing of time and loss. I mess it up and try to combine it and, fingers crossed, in this one, for some people, at least it seems to be gelling.”

Perhaps this is the heart of the movie’s wide appeal. It is both riotously funny and desperately sad. Both fantastical and down to earth. Summery and wintry. It’s not this or that; it’s this *and* that. A bit like life. 🍷

THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD IS IN CINEMAS FROM 25 MARCH



Above: Reinsve takes a pause from shooting one of the film’s standout scenes.

Right: Successful comic-book creator Aksel at work.



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STRAIGHT OUTTA BIRMINGHAM AND CONQUERING THE WORLD,
GANGSTER DRAMA **PEAKY BLINDERS** IS A HOMEGROWN PHENOMENON.
WITH SEASON 6 ON THE WAY, WE GOT CREATOR STEVEN KNIGHT AND
STAR CILLIAN MURPHY TOGETHER TO TALK MYTHOLOGY AND MURDER

WORDS JAMES DYER

ILLUSTRATION MATT NEEDLE



A

AMID A RAIN of factory ash, Cillian Murphy's Tommy Shelby trots bareback through the cobbled streets of Birmingham's Small Heath atop a monstrous black stallion. Over the yell of street hawkers and the belch of coal fires, the ominous chimes of Nick Cave's *Red Right Hand* herald his passing. From this very first scene back in 2013, it was clear that *Peaky Blinders* was no run-of-the-mill period drama.

Steven Knight's show pictured a world in which flatcaps, razor blades, whisky tumblers, pocket watches, coal yards, canal boats, and an endless cloud of billowing smoke formed the backdrop for a gang of cool-as-fuck criminals in tailored tweed. A gang whose larger-than-life characters were drawn from the backstreet fables of Knight's Birmingham childhood. Boasting a soundtrack for the ages, *Peaky Blinders* turned working-class men into rock stars, layering American-inspired sizzle onto a none-more-British story.

The BBC can hardly have imagined the cultural monster they were creating when they first commissioned a series about Brummie gangsters in the 1920s. The show, which counts Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts and Michael Mann among its many vocal fans, has become the most searched Netflix series in 24 countries, and in 2019, saw 15,000 people descend on Digbeth wearing flatcaps and three-piece suits as Liam Gallagher headlined the first *Peaky Blinders* festival.

This year sees the arrival of the sixth and final season, picking up from a finale that left gangster-turned-MP Tommy Shelby screaming into the void, the barrel of a pistol pressed firmly to one temple. Here, *Empire* brings Murphy and Knight together for a look back at the series that took shape in the back alleys of South-East Birmingham, but went on to conquer the world.

Given the impact of the show now, it's hard to believe that it wasn't an instant hit back in 2013.

Steven Knight: Yeah, it really wasn't. It is absolutely success born from people seeing it and telling other people how much they love it. It's huge in South America, it's huge in Russia, it's huge in China, for God's sake. Film is magnificent, but television is durable — people have the time to go out and find it, and they went out and found *Peaky*. Cillian, did you see that on TikTok, there have been six-and-a-half billion views of *Peaky*-related material put together by fans? Six-and-a-half billion!



Cillian Murphy: What? Oh my word, that's incredible.

Knight: Seriously. Everybody in the world plus some people who haven't ever existed. It's the most gratifying thing. Far more than good reviews or even great viewing figures, it's the fact that it stepped into popular culture in a way that not many other things have.

Murphy: Tommy's house has become a major destination for weddings now. Sometimes we can't even shoot there because they're so busy with *Peaky Blinder* weddings!

You can't have seen any of this coming when you went to the BBC and asked them to greenlight a Brummie period drama.

Knight: I don't know why they went for it! I think what's unusual about it is that the British have

a very particular way of depicting the working class. Something that irritated me from when I was a kid was watching television where anyone with a working-class accent was either scary or a joke. In this drama, they're none of those things. They're not asking for anything or looking for any sympathy.

Murphy: I remember reading the first two episodes and that first scene where Tommy rides bareback through the street. That's a stunning piece of writing, and so original. It made working-class people sophisticated and potentially dangerous and all of those things. It was just brilliant, brilliant writing.

Knight: That first scene was to deliberately show this was a Western set in Birmingham. Americans took their working-class history — 19th-century agricultural labourers who work with cows — and



created the Western. So why not do it here? It's like Americans can write songs about their cities, but it's very difficult to write a song about Rotherham. But why not? What's the difference? It's being bold and stupid and saying, "Okay, we can do this." And it worked.

So much of *Peaky Blinders* is a reflection of real life. Steven, how close is the Small Heath of the show to that of your parents' childhood?

Knight: It was the world that they remembered, because they were kids. The Garrison was a pretty rough, ordinary pub, but they remembered it as this theatre, this cathedral. And the horses were ordinary horses, but they remembered them as being huge, black stallions. So they mythologised their memories of life as kids, then they told me when *I* was a kid, so it got doubly mythologised. It was a very conscious decision early on that we maintain that mythology. But so many of the characters are based on real people. Jeremiah and Danny Whizz-Bang and the brothers and Polly — all of them have roots in real people. But I think the reason they feel so fully-formed is really because of the actors who played those roles.

Murphy: I would say that it's the writing.

Knight: *[laughs]* It's the acting.

Murphy: The brilliant thing Steve did right from the beginning was include the shadow of the First World War.

There was talk and memories of what they were like before they went to France, and then we see them when they came back and they were in pieces. So to have these characters that are trying to pick themselves up and put themselves together and have this already formed history was an amazingly clever device. Tommy's neither the square-jawed hero, nor the nefarious villain, but somewhere in-between, and it's in that contradiction that you get great characters. He had this aura about him, even on the page: this mystery and this intelligence, but he's also completely broken.

You can't talk about *Peaky Blinders* without discussing the music. When did the idea to pull contemporary tracks into a period drama come about?

Murphy: It came from Otto Bathurst, who was >



Top to bottom:

"This place is under new management..." etc — Arthur Shelby (Paul Anderson) and brother Tommy (Cillian Murphy) relax at the Garrison in Season 6; *Peaky Blinders* writer Steven Knight and Murphy on set.



director of the first three episodes. And it just worked, didn't it, Steve?

Knight: Yeah. I think there was a phase where people were putting contemporary music to the edit, just to give it sort of a rhythm. And with *Peaky* that carried on into the actual broadcast. We've been so phenomenally lucky — some of my musical heroes of all time have offered their music to us to put in. I think it must've been Series 4 when we got contacted by David Bowie's agent saying that they were interested in having some music in the series. Between Christmas and New Year he came to the house to play me some tracks from his final album. New Year's Day came and then a couple of days later I heard on the radio that he'd passed away. It was just so amazing that among the things he was doing at the end of his life was organising that some of his music appear on *Peaky*. For me, when I was a teenager, Bowie was it. He was everybody.

Murphy: I was lucky enough to meet him and I gave him a gift of the cap I wore on Season 1. But he wasn't the only one: Leonard Cohen actively petitioned to be on the show, didn't he, Steve?

Knight: Yeah. It's very odd how *Peaky* crosses over. Snoop Dogg came to London and asked to meet and was talking about how *Peaky* reminded him of how he got involved in gang culture in South Central. Now it baffles me how that can be the case. But he and A\$AP Rocky as well: massive fans who felt there was a resonance between their own upbringing and *Peaky*. If that's not universality, I don't know what is.

Cillian, you initially had reservations about the music, didn't you?

Murphy: Yes. I had seen it fail before on both film and television. I think Nick Cave kind of unlocked everything — particularly that tune, *Red Right Hand*. There's something about the energy of his music. Bowie said it brilliantly about the music for *Peaky* from the beginning, "It's artists that have avoided the tyranny of the mainstream."

You've had some outstanding guest villains over the course of the series, but no-one quite holds a candle to Tom Hardy's Alfie Solomons.

Murphy: [laughs] Tom will only turn up for maybe one or two days per season, but we always cross-shoot those, so there's a camera on each actor simultaneously and it becomes like a piece of theatre. There can be 20, 25-minute takes of these two characters just having at it — I've never had that on any other job. I know Tom very well, we're good pals, but it's something special when Tommy and Alfie have their scenes. They're some of my favourite days on *Peaky* for sure.

Knight: To begin with there was a lot of improv with Alfie but I think now much less so, now that the character is fixed. There was a bit of give and take — I see what he's done and then I'll write



stuff and he responds. Tom loves the character, loves who Alfie is. And long may he last.

Looking at the arc Tommy's gone through over the course of the show, are you surprised by where he's ended up?

Murphy: No, I'm not surprised. I think the thing that separates him from most protagonists is that he has no fear of death. That was there from the very beginning and you're in a different world with someone who is in that headspace. Even though he's done the classic thing of going legit, made his way into the world of the establishment, he still keeps bashing against his own demons in his head. He's always dealing with this shit. When I started playing him, I was 35. I'm 45 now and a lot of this stuff comes and bites you in the arse in middle age — particularly for men. So you combine all that with all the shit that he's been suffering from the First World War and it's an amazing cocktail to try and play. We saw where we left him in Series 5, with a gun to his head. So you think, "Where can you go from there with this character?"

What state is Tommy in when we rejoin him this time around?

Knight: [laughs] Well, the big shock is that when we rejoin Season 6, Tommy's dead!

Murphy: Yeah. Why am I even here?



Top to bottom:

Gina (Anya Taylor-Joy), Michael (Finn Cole) and Polly (Helen McCrory) in the Garrison; Arthur heads up the boardroom in Season 5; Tommy with old friend/foe Alfie Solomons (Tom Hardy).

Right: He's alive! Tommy emerges in Episode 1 of the sixth and final series.

Knight: No, I mean we can't really give anything away, but I think every season he's been different to the last.

One of the most memorable moments from Series 5 is right at the start, when Polly and Tommy visit the nuns and Helen McCrory delivers that ice-cold threat: "Listen for my footsteps."

Knight: That's a real line. There was a producer I know who was working on the story of Whitey Bulger, the Boston gangster. He was having conversations with this hitman who had killed so many people — he was gonna make a film about his life. In the way of films, it was all a bit slow and things weren't going ahead. So he got a phone call from this bloke asking how it was going. It was all quite lighthearted and at the end of the call, the guy just said, "Listen for my footsteps." And put the phone down. As a writer, you have to gather those little lines, and I thought that was a great one.

Helen's death in April this year must have been a terrible shock. Was coming back to do this last season after that a bittersweet experience?

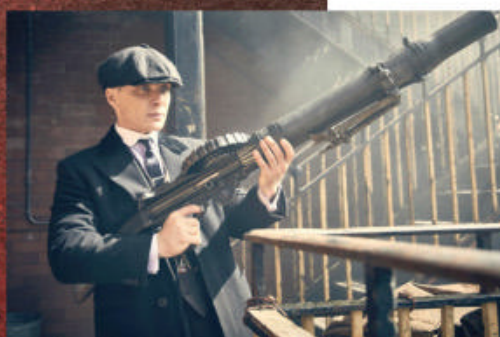
Murphy: What I always feel sad about is that we were about to shoot and then the pandemic happened and we had to stop. If we had shot



Above right, top to bottom: *Top Gear*, 1920s style; Aunt Polly — the epitome of cool; Linda (Kate Phillips), Esme (Aimee-Ffion Edwards), Lizzie (Natasha O’Keeffe) and Polly head to the Bull Ring for a workers’ rally in Season 3.



Top to bottom, from above: The pheasants didn’t stand a chance; Mine’s significantly bigger than yours; Polly with Mafia boss Luca Changretta (Adrien Brody) in Season 4.



then, Helen would’ve been in the show, and that makes me feel sad. It’s a huge loss; it’s hard to comprehend it. Because she was the matriarch of the whole thing. As the character, but just also as her personality. But she’s still present in Series 6. Steve has managed to keep her very, very present, which I think is a brilliant tribute to Steve and also to Helen. But we couldn’t quite fathom it all as we were making it, you know?

With this final season, are you ending where you anticipated? How planned-out was the final destination?

Murphy: Occasionally, myself and Steve will meet and we’ll have a lunch and he’ll tell me some stuff but generally I don’t know until the scripts arrive and I go, “Holy fuck! He’s not doing that! No way!” The thing is, I can never, ever predict what he’s going to do, no matter how good I think I am or how well I know the character.

Knight: If it’s any comfort, it’s exactly the same for me. I don’t know what’s gonna happen until I get to writing. The way I tend to work is not to plan, and I think if I did plan, I wouldn’t be able to do it. Just sit at the keyboard and if you know the characters well enough, let ’em loose and see what they say to each other. Let the dialogue guide the plot.

What were your objectives with this final season?

Knight: I was looking for a very unconventional form of redemption. Which I think we’ve achieved.

Murphy: My job is just to bring that to life, but the only thing I’ll say about Series 6... the one word I keep using is gothic. It feels quite gothic to me. And I know that’s kind of nebulous, that word. But when you see it, I think you’ll understand.

This is the last TV instalment, but you do have a movie in the works as well. Steven, you said early on that you saw this story as existing between wars, beginning in the aftermath of World War I and ending with the first air-raid siren in Birmingham in 1940. Is that still the plan?

Knight: It was always Britain between the wars — how the lesson from one war was not learned and was repeated. It’s also the end of empire: we enter the Second World War and by the end of it, there is no empire, really. But I... have revised the scope of what it is. It will now go into and beyond the Second World War. Because I just think the energy that is out there in the world for this, I want to keep it going, and I want to see how this can progress beyond that. I think of this sixth series as the end of the beginning. 🍷

PEAKY BLINDERS SEASON 6 WILL AIR ON BBC ONE IN EARLY 2022

ROOM NECCA

FOR TWO DECADES, THE ACTOR HAS BEEN BURNING
UP BOTH SCREEN AND STAGE. BUT NOW, WITH
AWARD NOMINATIONS COMING THICK AND FAST,
SHE'S READY TO CONQUER THE WORLD

WORDS HANNA FLINT

PORTRAITS RAMONA ROSALES

TAKES CHARGE

Ruth Negga,
photographed
exclusively for
Empire in the
Hollywood Hills,
Los Angeles, on
10 December 2021.





RUTH NEGGA HAD A PROBLEM.

The ‘best friend’. She was sick of best friends.

As a young actor working in Ireland and London in the early 2000s, she was frustrated. Ireland was tough, but “London was harder”, she says. “Nothing ever was completely direct, but there was very much this idea that as a woman of colour, you go in for the best-friend role. It was unquestioned and I remember thinking, ‘This is fucking narrow.’ I don’t recall many people I met, you know, directors, thinking outside the box — it depressed me.”

So, on a mission to not play best friends, she found her own way, building a career that most actors, let alone women of colour, would covet. She won’t be typecast, won’t be constrained by one medium, embracing every film, TV or theatre role that tickles her fancy. Early supporting parts in Channel 4’s *Misfits* and Neil Jordan’s transgender drama *Breakfast On Pluto* established her as a force. Then, her scene-stealing turn in comic-book series *Preacher* as the riotous Tulip O’Hare made her a fan-

favourite for her fearlessly hot-headed take on what could have been just another generic love interest.

In 2016 she starred in *Loving*, Jeff Nichols’ historical drama about an interracial couple whose marriage changed American history. Negga’s stunning turn as Mildred Loving introduced the civil-rights pioneer to a new generation. She earned Oscar and Golden Globe nominations for it — and has been nominated for another Golden Globe for last year’s *Passing*. A film for which Negga did something unexpected: she played a best friend. But this was her choice. And on her own terms.

In Rebecca Hall’s directorial debut, Negga plays Clare, a biracial black woman in early 20th century America passing for white and married to Alexander Skarsgård’s well-to-do white racist. Negga, Hall (whose American grandfather was Black and passed for white) and co-star Tessa Thompson bring uncanny authenticity to an utterly compelling story of race, womanhood

and female desire that is as relevant now as it was when author Nella Larsen wrote the 1929 novel.

As a mixed-race woman whose racial identity was constantly scrutinised during her childhood and continues to be today, Negga didn’t have to pretend to comprehend the politics of passing. In many ways, she has been waiting all her life to bring such vital stories to the world. Her ability to fully embody her characters, fill them with humanity and depth, fuels the Irish-Ethiopian’s star power, especially for those with marginalised backgrounds similar to her own. Yet despite her acclaim, Negga is loath to see herself as a conscious career architect. “I didn’t have a plan and I don’t believe in accepting jobs as stepping stones,” she says. “But I do believe in utilising your opportunities to the best of your abilities.” And she’s made those opportunities for herself.

BORN IN ETHIOPIA, AT THE AGE OF SEVEN Negga tragically lost her father, a doctor of Tigrayan heritage, and was taken by her Irish mother, a nurse, to live between the overwhelmingly white community of Limerick, Ireland, and then the slightly more diverse area of south-east London. Her eclectic taste in entertainment began as a kid with insomnia who would stay up into the wee hours watching “weird movies”. Late-night features included Jim Jarmusch’s *Mystery Train* and French dramas such as *The 400 Blows* and *La Haine*, although fantasy films like *Labyrinth* and *Willow* were just as formative. It was her mother, though, who instilled an adoration for theatre. “My mum took me to plays all the time; she loves words, theatre and literature,” Negga says affectionately. “I grew up in a very wordy household and that’s definitely [the case] for a lot of Irish people. We’re a very loquacious nation.”

At white-dominated schools in London she had to deal with othering, because of her Irish accent as much as her brown skin. By then a prolific reader, she found solace in the writings of Malcolm X, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison and *Passing*’s Larsen to help her understand what she was experiencing. “I kept seeing myself being witnessed in her [Larsen’s] book,” she says. “I kept having to put it down. We’ve been grappling with this shit for a long time.”

She returned to Ireland to complete a BA in Theatre Studies at the Samuel Beckett Centre in Trinity College, Dublin. Then a shy girl, the experience was the “hardest thing” she’s ever had to do for her career. “I was quite fearful, but drama school freed me from my insecurity in [that it] made me confident in my skill set,” she says.

The slog was worth it: she graduated with distinction in 2002, and two years later received a nomination at the Laurence Olivier Awards for Best Newcomer In A Play, for her role in Irish playwright Stella Feehily’s *Duck*. The coming-of-age story about two teenaged



Above: Making a mark as Charlie alongside Cillian Murphy in 2005 transgender drama *Breakfast On Pluto*; **Below:** As a post-Terrigenesis Raina in Marvel’s *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.*



This page and previous: Black top and skirt: Balenciaga.

Dublin girls forced to grow up too soon had critics raving over Negga's raw portrait of an enticing young bar hostess trying to avoid a life of unfulfillment. Over the next few years, she worked steadily across Ireland and London, doing a *Doctors* episode here and an Irish horror film there, but it was frustrating to experience an industry still catering to a white standard of casting.

Her commitment to theatre provided more chances to play roles usually reserved for her white counterparts. In 2006, she was cast as the virtuous daughter of the eponymous Roman general in a Dublin production of *Titus Andronicus*. "I couldn't believe I was in a Shakespeare play and getting paid for it," Negga chuckles. Her awe can be felt down the line from 5,442 miles away. "There's just nothing better than saying the words and playing it every night. Layer upon layer, it just plumbs the depths of the soul and the psyche."

Her acclaimed performance was followed a few years later with a lauded turn as Ophelia in the National Theatre's 2010 production of *Hamlet*, then in 2018 played the main man himself in Yaël Farber's atmospheric vision of the Danish play at the Gate Theatre in Dublin. Critics praised the unbridled physicality she brought to it, and two years later the production transferred to St Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, to further acclaim. It was one of the biggest challenges of her life.

"It's very vulnerable playing Hamlet because you're fusing yourself to the role," she says. "You're letting the words find their way inside you, nudge and irritate your wounds, awaken your desires and your longings. It's very humbling, but it does give you this immense respect for the craft. For the language, for actors, for the power of words, the power of play, the power of performance. It was the biggest and the greatest privilege... apart from playing Mildred Loving." If *Hamlet* was the role to cement her stage eminence, *Loving* confirmed Negga as a bona fide movie star.

JEFF NICHOLS' ROMANTIC DRAMA WAS based on the true story of Richard and Mildred Loving, a couple who after eloping to Washington DC in 1958 were arrested upon their return home to Virginia, where interracial marriage was illegal. Their civil rights fight went all the way to the US Supreme Court, and in 1967 the judges finally overturned the Lovings' convictions and ruled that state laws against interracial marriage were unconstitutional.

Nichols steeped this inspiring love story in understated tenderness, while a heartfelt Negga gave Mildred gentle poise. But it was more than a role to her. *Loving* — for which Negga garnered those Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations, as well as one for BAFTA Rising Star — confirmed something she has long believed. That the US was the place she needed to be to tell far more Black stories. "Europe is quite snobby about America, thinking it's more

progressive on matters of race, and I just didn't see that," she says. "I work mainly in America, and I'm not saying it's all roses here by any means — people didn't know Mildred Loving and she should be one of their civil rights icons. She and her husband changed the Constitution of the United States and practically no-one had heard of her when our film came out, or Nella Larsen. But I've found there have been more opportunities [there] — maybe because it's a bigger country — so it's a privilege to be part of any kind of movement that sheds light on fabulous Black women. Indeed, all stories that have been marginalised or scrubbed from history for various reasons."

Negga has a hugely personal interest in the social, political and cinematic history of Black people. Yet while the thematic crossovers between *Loving* and *Passing* are self-evident, the two women she has immortalised couldn't be more different. When Hall came to Negga with her plan to write and direct a film based on the early 1929 Harlem Renaissance novel, asking her

to act in it, it was a no-brainer — except, after being reacquainted with Larsen's story, Negga made her own suggestion.

Hall asked her to play the protagonist, Irene — an uptight, light-skinned Black housewife who prides herself on having a family and security within the Black community of New York City. Negga, however, wanted to play the supporting but by-no-means less substantial part of Clare — Irene's estranged childhood best friend. "I was curious about her because she's a livewire who walks this fine line between safety and danger," says Negga. "This is a woman who is unapologetic, is living fully as herself and made it an active part of her life to reject shame."

With her platinum-blonde locks and magnetic personality, Clare enters her old pal's stifled world and throws it entirely off-balance. She's a charismatic character who makes Irene question herself, her marriage and what she holds dear. The director didn't take much convincing to accept her request. "Ruth was



Above: As Clare alongside Tessa Thompson's Irene in *Passing*. **Below:** Acting her way to her first Oscar nomination as Mildred Loving alongside Joel Edgerton in the lauded *Loving*.



Purple dress: Valentino.





so passionate and supportive about the project,” Hall tells *Empire*. “She’d come off the back of so much work where she had exhibited a capacity to play these stoical, emotionally repressed characters who are not necessarily saying what they feel but she’s got a real transparency to her. It was exciting.”

The film might be shot in black-and-white, but the complexities of these women and their experiences are anything but. Safety, both within white America and the Black community, are key themes, as is the notion and ambiguity of identity. How the world sees Clare and Irene (played by Thompson) impacts the way they see themselves, for better and for worse, and Negga knows a fair bit about that. “What is it to be Black? To be Black enough [or] not Black enough?” she questions. “A lot of the time these conversations happen outside of your control and I try to reclaim myself from that. That’s what Clare is doing.”

There’s no doubting how much the film means to Negga. “We had countless, deeply

personal conversations,” she says of the production process. “Those kinds of conversations are in my life anyway. I want to have them with people who are similar and going through similar things because there’s a solidarity there and you feel seen.”

Having lost her father when she was young, Negga brought even more of a personal connection to the character, a woman who was raised by her white aunts after the death of her parents. “I can totally identify with that unmooring of losing a parent at such an early age and the lifetime of consequences involved,” she explains. “It affects you physically, it affects where you live, how you live. Your body, your mind, your imagination and your intellect are all part of the process, and if that part of that character’s narrative aligns with yours, it’s inevitable that it would form that creation, whether consciously or unconsciously. To be honest, I bring my entire biography.”

LIGHT-SKINNED BLACK ACTORS FAVOURED over dark-skinned is a continuous casting issue. “I’m sure I’ve benefitted from colourism because of how I present, but how do I negotiate that?” Negga asks. “Where does your ambition collide with your inner knowledge? Is this part yours or are you taking away this part from someone more legitimate?” When I read material I know when a part’s mine and when it’s not mine.”

That searching curiosity is what lifts Negga’s characters off the page and into full-bodied human beings — though she doesn’t just save this introspective approach for the more highbrow credits on her résumé. After appearances in *World War Z*, *Warcraft* and *Ad Astra*, Negga would love to do more genre projects, science-fiction particularly. She’s excited to check out Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Earthsea* book series after a friend’s recommendation and is “obsessed” with Octavia E. Butler’s work, especially her 1979 novel *Kindred*, about a Black female writer being violently pulled back and forth in time to a 19th-century plantation. “It’s unbelievably brilliant because I’d love to time-travel, except I think I’d have to be invisible because I’m brown,” she says. “And obviously, she confirms it!”

For now, she’s focused on her next dangerous liaison with Shakespeare, as Lady Macbeth opposite Daniel Craig in a new Broadway adaptation directed by Tony award-winner Sam Gold and produced by James Bond’s Barbara Broccoli. Negga wasn’t that familiar with the play, but after researching it was keen to discuss how Lady Macbeth had been frequently demonised when the entire cast sat down for a creative conflagration. “What have people been doing casting her as this sort of evil-witch pig?” she remembers asking. “She’s not! I don’t see it! And everyone was kind of like, ‘Yeah, we know, Ruth. Jesus, catch up!’”

There’s rarely a moment when Negga articulates without candour, conviction or wit. With so much to say, it’s a wonder she doesn’t share her opinions more directly via social media. She shudders at the thought — someone on her team maintains her Instagram and she avoids Twitter at all costs. “I’d have a nervous breakdown! I don’t know how people cope with it,” she says. “I’m only finding out what people think about [*Passing*] at Q&A screenings and it’s been extraordinary. That some piece of art moved you, changed your perspective, enlightened you in some way — for people to share that with you, face-to-face, is really profound. You realise this is bigger than all of us and at the same time, it is deeply personal.”

Negga believes in the power of art; whether that be through the timeless verses of Shakespeare, the marginalised voices of history’s forgotten women or comic-book creations brought to life in profane and bloody fashion. She refuses to box herself into what people expect of a great actor. Yet that’s what she is. 🍷

PASSING IS OUT NOW ON NETFLIX



Above: As Mars administrator Helen Lantos alongside Brad Pitt in sci-fi mood-piece *Ad Astra*. **Below:** Negga, Joseph Gilgun and Dominic Cooper in TV’s *Preacher*.







GODS AMONG US

In our regular series, we pay tribute
to the towering, mega-watt stars
who still roam Hollywood

**This month: The leading
man who radiates authority**

DENZEL WASHINGTON

WORDS IAN FREER

ILLUSTRATION CHRISTOPHER LEE LYONS

SO STEADFAST IS the character of Denzel Washington, you have to look far and wide to discover some offscreen sizzle. But there is some. In 1994, shooting Tony Scott's *Crimson Tide* on stage 16 of The Culver Studios, Washington went toe to toe with uncredited co-writer Quentin Tarantino about the number of racial epithets in the submarine script. When Tarantino replied, citing the need for realistic dialogue, Washington didn't back down. "He's a fine artist," Washington later said to *GQ* magazine about Tarantino, "and I told him my feelings. So, he knows what I had to talk about." You can count on Denzel to be direct. To speak his mind. And in facing off against Tarantino on this matter, the altercation suggests traits Washington shares with practically all of his characters: inner strength, and authority.

Some people crave authority (or, in the case of *South Park*'s Eric Theodore Cartman, who lives for it: "authoritah"). Others — such as Denzel Hayes Washington Jr — just ooze it.

Maybe more than any other actor working today, in Denzel (or 'D' if you're Spike Lee) we trust. His characters are self-possessed, articulate and in control. He doesn't play wackadoodle outsiders or snivelling losers; instead he inhabits cops, lawyers, military types, activists, and, in Joel Coen's upcoming *The Tragedy Of Macbeth*, a Scottish king.

Learning his craft on stage, he is technically gifted — his on-point British accent in 1988's crime drama *For Queen And Country* makes it a crying shame he never played James Bond — but never performative. His taste in projects skews towards the adult. There are no superhero films on his CV and only one sequel, 2018's *The Equalizer 2*, although his PI Easy Rawlins in *Devil In A Blue Dress* (1995) could have easily carried a franchise.

In some ways Washington is a throwback, his charisma and gravitas invoking earlier talent. Early roles (1991's *Mississippi Masala*, *Devil...*) suggested the smouldering intensity of Paul Newman — Washington was voted *People's* >



THE BOX OFFICE

Denzel Washington's top five money-makers*

AMERICAN GANGSTER

\$270 million

SAFE HOUSE

\$208 million

PHILADELPHIA

\$207 million

THE PELICAN BRIEF

\$195 million

THE EQUALIZER

\$192 million

* Global box office, according to [BoxOfficeMojo.com](https://www.boxofficemojo.com)

Sexiest Man Alive in 1996. He later grew into the kind of integrity and stature associated with Henry Fonda or Gregory Peck. In the pantheon of Black stars, he is a natural successor to his mentor and idol Sidney Poitier, but with one crucial difference. Blazing a trail, Poitier mostly played perfect, idealised role models. Washington just plays the truth.



Washington first met Poitier in 1981 while starring in the off-Broadway production of Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play*. The older actor took the young buck under his wing and schooled him in the ways of a Hollywood career. An early pearl of Poitier wisdom — "If they see you for free all week, they won't pay to see you on the weekend" — has served Washington well.

A key weapon in his arsenal as an actor is that we know practically nothing about him. He's been quietly married to actor Pauletta Pearson for 38 years (their son John David Washington is racking up an impressive array of credits, from *BlacKkKlansman* to *Tenet*). He has never been

a fixture in the gossip columns, doesn't overshare to Jimmy Fallon or bare his private life on Insta. It's much easier to believe in his integrity on screen when there isn't anything to dispute it off screen.

It was TV's *St. Elsewhere*, in which he played Dr Phil Chandler for six years, that put the actor in the public consciousness. And when Hollywood started calling, he once again turned to Poitier for guidance. "I got a part in a movie in 1986," Washington told *Times Talks* in 2010, about a Black character who seemed unkillable. "He raped a white woman and they tried to electrocute him but it didn't work." Washington called Poitier and told him they were offering him \$600,000 for a film he saw as exploitative. "He told me, 'I'm not going to tell you what to do. But I will tell you this: the first two or three or four films you do in this business will dictate how you're perceived'... I turned it down and six months later I got *Cry Freedom*."

This decision to ditch the easy route so early





Clockwise from main: As Trip in 1989's *Glory*. Washington would win his first Oscar; Spike Lee Joint #1 — *Mo' Better Blues*; As Steve Biko in *Cry Freedom* — the plaudits flooded in; With Don Cheadle in *A Devil In A Blue Dress*.

in his career is redolent not only of Washington's personal tenacity but also of the inner steel that runs through his characters. It's a choice that paid dividends. Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom* saw him play murdered South African activist Steve Biko. If on paper Biko is little more than a conduit for Kevin Kline's journalist Donald Woods to experience the injustices of Apartheid, Washington fleshes the character out with charm, humour and poise. It's a scene-stealing turn ("The star by right of talent," wrote critic Pauline Kael) and earned him his first Best Supporting Oscar nomination.

His first actual win came in 1990 for Ed Zwick's *Glory*, playing Private Silas Trip, a defiant runaway slave who joins a volunteer Unionist regiment of African American volunteers during the Civil War. Not wishing to get stuck in a rut, Trip flies in the face of the cultured, educated characters Washington had previously played. "The guy I play in *Glory* is raw and rough," Washington told *The New York Times*. "A field Negro, not a house Negro, and he's a real survivor." The film's most memorable moment comes when Trip is

brutally whipped for an incorrect charge of desertion, a reminder of his previous life. Yet rather than reacting with screams, a single tear rolls down Trip's cheek.

"That wasn't planned," Washington recalled. "It just happened. I was thinking, 'There is nothing else they can do to me.' These are tears of defiance, really."

The power in this moment comes from Washington's restraint, covering up years of Trip's humiliation and anger, saying more about the man's past than a million monologues ever could. This scene, and the Oscar win, became Washington's calling card to the big leagues. But it would take a new collaborator to draw the best out of him.



Spike Lee wrote the role of tortured trumpet player Bleek Gilliam in *Mo' Better Blues* for Washington, and the pair have worked together three more times, on *Malcolm X*, *He Got Game* and *Inside Man*. The collaborations feel unique in Washington's CV, often tamping down



his movie-star qualities — the warmth, the charisma, the ease — to tap into the actor. Even in a genre piece like *Inside Man*, Lee draws the real and recognisable from him.

The pair's crowning glory is 1992's *Malcolm X*. Washington was all set to make the biopic with director Norman Jewison until the latter stepped down after an outcry erupted about a white director documenting the life of a radical Black figure (Lee was among the most vociferous voices). Washington had previously researched the role, playing Malcolm on stage in Laurence Holder's *When The Chickens Came Home To Roost* in 1981, devouring books by and about X and watching hours and hours of footage. For Lee's movie, Washington went even further, interviewing people including X's wife Betty Shabazz and his brothers, undergoing a two-week training course with members of the Nation Of Islam and subjecting himself to a tortuous process of having his hair dyed red and conked, a straightening process fashionable among Black men in the '50s.

The result is Washington's tour-de-force, convincing in each of X's iterations: the small-time crim Detroit Red, the increasingly

aware Malcolm Little, the militant Malcolm X and, after moving to Mecca, el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz. Washington gets to the root of the man, savvy and sharp, a killer smile belying a well of simmering wrath. He never forgets the human side of the character — listen to the sigh of relief after Betty (Angela Bassett) accepts his marriage proposal — but this is a towering, thunderous performance that comes alive when X is on a stage.

Washington harnesses all of X's power without ever feeling like an impersonation. It gave him some of the best reviews of his career ("Washington's revelatory performance shows us his indomitable resolve as if from the inside out," raved *Entertainment Weekly*), and was the most fulsome demonstration of his intensity to date.

His next dive into the deep end came with Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia*. In a role initially set for Bill Murray or Robin Williams, Washington is Joe Miller, a personal injury lawyer forced to confront his own homophobia when he agrees to represent AIDS-stricken lawyer Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks). Washington perfectly modulates Miller's

journey from bigotry to some semblance of understanding, but comes into his own winning over the jury in the film's courtroom scenes. *Philadelphia* also sees Washington for the first time dominating in traditionally 'white' spaces. It wouldn't be the last.

Tom Hanks won the Best Actor Oscar for playing the more showy role but, as with Tom Cruise in *Rain Man*, it is Washington who sells the relationship. Sharing a similar screen-time to Hanks, he wasn't nominated in the Best Supporting Actor category because his agent Ed Limato would only put him up for Best Actor. The message became clear: Denzel Washington doesn't support anyone. From here on in, Washington's name would always be first on the poster.



The popular success of 1993's *The Pelican Brief* and *Philadelphia* ensured Washington's hard-earned leading-man status. It also coincided with a new working partnership. Tony Scott first cast Washington as Frank Hunter, a newbie, by-the-book executive officer aboard a nuclear





Clockwise from left: Taking the lead in *Crimson Tide*; As the iconic activist in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*; With Gero Camilo in *Man On Fire*; Alongside Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia*.



submarine, in 1995's *Crimson Tide*. Part of the joy of the film is watching Washington, by this time aged 41, going *mano a mano* with 65-year-old legend Gene Hackman. "I was super-prepared because it's Gene Hackman," Washington told Radio 1's Ali Plumb. "It's like a heavyweight fight and he's the champ." Come the final bell, Washington has more than held his own.

After *Crimson Tide*, again for Scott he played a bodyguard cum one-man-army in *Man On Fire* (2004), a time-travelling ATF agent in *Déjà Vu* (2006), an under-pressure subway dispatcher in a remake of *The Taking Of Pelham 123* (2009) and a veteran railroad engineer put out to

pasture in *Unstoppable* (2010). Taken together, they reveal another element that weighs into his on-screen demeanour: competency. Across his roles for Scott (and beyond), Washington's characters not only keep their heads under pressure, they are also capable, bordering on proficient. John Creasy in *Man On Fire* is not merely a tenacious (not to mention overzealous) bodyguard — he makes Kevin Costner look like an unpaid intern. Be it facing nuclear devastation in *Crimson Tide* or a train that won't slow down in *Unstoppable*, Washington's work with Scott is a gallery of men who remain unflappable.

In 1999, he tackled *The Hurricane*, the true-life story of boxer Rubin "The Hurricane" Carter, wrongly convicted of a triple murder in a New Jersey bar. It's a spare performance — literally; the actor lost more than 40lbs for the role — as Carter's mindset begins to mentally detach from his circumstances. When Carter tells his teenage visitor (Vicellous Reon Shannon), "Do not write me. Do not visit me. Find it in your hearts to not weaken me with your love," Washington delivers it with both barrels. His performance toggles from rage



THE MOMENT

The King Kong speech

Training Day (2001)



LAPD Detective Sergeant Alonzo Harris' 'King Kong speech' in *Training Day* is one of the great modern movie monologues. In essence, it is the rant of a king watching his kingdom crumble; Harris has lost control of his neighbourhood, local hoods are siding with his partner Jake (Ethan Hawke) and the Russian Mafia are closing in. As he takes centre stage on a crowded street, Washington holds court in a thrilling piece of street theatre, investing David Ayer's dialogue with all the swagger of gangsta rap and the tragedy of a Shakespearean speech. "I run shit here, you just live here," he tells the increasingly dwindling crowd, people tired of his empty stylings. "That's right! You better walk away because I'm gonna burn this motherfucker down. KING KONG AIN'T GOT SHIT ON ME." Washington ad-libbed that line in the moment, providing a window into Harris' ego. Much of the scene's strength comes from Washington's courage to play against type, a defeated man railing against a world slipping through his fingers. It's a pitch-perfect expression of something usually antithetical to a Washington character — vanity run amok — and it's this flex and this moment that just might have won him his Oscar.





Clockwise
from left: Scoring his second Oscar — and first Best Actor gong — alongside Ethan Hawke in *Training Day*; Reprising his Broadway role in *Fences*, with Viola Davis. Washington also directed; A flawed hero in *Flight*; With Frances McDormand in acclaimed Shakespeare adaptation *The Tragedy Of Macbeth*.

to acceptance to fortitude, a portrait of hope in a hopeless place.

After a washed-up boxer, Washington elevated another stock character — The Inspirational High School Football Coach — in 2000's *Remember The Titans*. A second true-life figure in a row, Washington assayed Herman Boone, a head coach who tried to integrate the T.C. Williams High School football team in 1971. It's a corny, predictable sports flick — yes, it all comes down to the last play of the game — but Washington's granite authoritarian grounds it. His dialogue is mostly platitudes — “This is no dictatorship. This is no democracy. I am the law” — but the oomph in the actor's delivery makes it live.

Following two such life-affirming figures, Washington's next move was a surprising left-turn into a period of experimentation with his image. Out went the noble hero. In came an absolute monster — and it brought him the ultimate accolade.



Washington was encouraged to take *Training Day* by his kids for one simple reason: he'd never portrayed a villain. Yet even playing corrupt narcotics detective Alonzo Harris, he leant on all

the innate command and dramatic heft of one of his heroic characters. “You might say that this is the first time I've played a bad guy, but I don't really see Alonzo as bad,” Washington told *Jet* magazine in 2001. “He's confused, over the line and angry. But he's not entirely bad. I think in some ways he's done his job too well. He's learned how to manipulate, how to push the line further, and, in the process, he's become more hardcore than the guys he's chasing.”

Alonzo Harris is a high-wire act, larger than life but completely believable. The intelligence that is an integral part of a Washington character is still there — check out the premeditated way he manipulates his rookie partner Jake (Ethan Hawke) into taking the rap for Alonzo's involvement with the Russian Mob — but here his sense of presence, his ability to dominate and overpower are put in command of one scary motherfucker. This can be in full-throttle mode — shaking down perps for their money and hash pipes — or in a quieter, more sinister way, explaining to Jake the long game in catching a crim (“This is chess, not checkers”). It is Washington strutting his stuff, to terrifying ends.

He won a Best Actor Oscar for his performance, joining an exclusive club of only six men who have won in both lead and supporting categories (Lemmon, De Niro,

Nicholson, Hackman and Spacey are the others). On the same night, Sydney Poitier won an honorary Oscar. “I'll always be chasing you, Sidney,” Washington told Poitier in his acceptance speech. Black writers such as David Dennis Jr and Charles Barkley have noted Washington's two Oscar wins came for playing a slave and a crooked cop — portrayals of Black men that white audiences would feel comfortable with — the Academy previously snubbing the actor on many other, perhaps more deserving, occasions such as *Malcolm X* or *The Hurricane*. “While the Oscars were passing on Washington, Black America became fully entranced by an actor unafraid to be us every time he was on the screen,” wrote Dennis Jr on theundefeated.com. “Washington loved us by being us: by expertly showcasing the best, most hopeful Black folks we can be — and showing the struggles of the damaged among us.”

Just as he played a lawman as unhinged, Washington played bona fide bad guy Frank Lucas in Ridley Scott's *American Gangster* (2007) as an absolute gentleman. Lucas lives by a code, a right and wrong way to do things. When Lucas assassinates uncouth mobster Tango (Idris Elba) on a crowded street, it's both marking his territory and an object lesson in propriety — in a lovely touch, following the hit,

Alamy, Allstar, Shutterstock



Lucas returns to his restaurant meal, resumes his conversation and daintily lays out his napkin on his lap. Lucas may shoot his rivals in the face but, in some ways, he is almost indistinguishable from Washington's heroes. He is emotionally restrained, professional, the smartest person in any room.

Washington took further risks with his good-guy persona in Robert Zemeckis' *Flight* (2012). He plays 'Whip' Whitaker, a pilot dubbed a hero after saving 96 passengers from apparently certain death, only to face charges for criminal manslaughter when drugs and booze are found in his system (it's typical of the expertise of a Washington character that he can fly an aircraft upside down while under the influence). Whitaker is a liar, both to others and himself, a man willing to turn up at a funeral to coerce his colleague to fiddle the truth about the day of his flight. It's a morality play that unfolds on Washington's face rather than in big speeches, and the actor lends 'Whip' maximum gravitas — despite that name.



A lot of Washington's presence as an actor has been honed on stage. In 2010, he starred on Broadway in *Fences*, one of ten plays in August

Wilson's 'Century Cycle' exploring 100 years of Black American life. In 2016, having previously directed *Antwone Fisher* (2002) and *The Great Debaters* (2007), Washington directed and starred in the film adaptation. Playing middle-aged man Troy Maxson, struggling to raise his family in 1950s Pittsburgh, Washington flits between spinning winning shaggy-dog stories and being brutally demanding towards his wife Rose (Viola Davis) and kids, movingly relaying Troy's lifetime of regrets (he is a failed baseball player) and restrictions (lack of employment opportunities forced by racism. Washington the director gives Washington the actor space to revel in Wilson's dialogue, and the result is spellbinding. It runs the gamut from fury ("As long as you're in my house, you put a 'Sir' on the end of it when you talk to me") to the thrilling monologue where Troy grandstands about battling with death for three days and three nights ("and I'm standing here to tell you about it"). *Fences* thrums with rich language, and Washington, bringing his A game, relishes all of it.

Last year he returned to his Shakespearean roots for Joel Coen's *The Tragedy Of Macbeth*. The project was driven by the director's wife, Frances McDormand, and there was only one choice for a scene partner. Washington, then 66, and McDormand, 64, were perfect as the power-crazed couple, their hunger and ambition perhaps sharpened by their advancing years. The film showcased Washington's trademark forte of complexity and thoughtfulness, this time underpinned by notes of sadness — yet he was also terrifying. The result was a Macbeth for the ages.

After deploying his skills to bring life to a 415-year-old play, it's fascinating to see where the actor will go next. That Washington has stayed relevant in a career lasting 40-plus years is through his ability to take timeless qualities — dignity, inner strength, grace — and reconfigure them across different characters, in novel ways. There is a seriousness in his roles, a meticulousness in his methodology and a sense of control over his career that suggest a classical, Poitier-esque approach to movie stardom. In recent years, he's become an internet meme — a shot of him concerned, then smiling, taken from chiller-thriller *Fallen* is often used to denote relief that a celebrity trending on Twitter hasn't died — but it takes more than an over-used GIF to undermine Denzel Washington's authority. 🍷



MIA

The Washington roles that never were



TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY

Washington was offered the role of Miles Dyson, the man behind the whole Skynet debacle, but passed as he felt all Dyson did was "look scared and sweat". Joe Morton stepped in.



SEVEN

Before Brad Pitt, Washington was in line to play David Mills in David Fincher's thriller but turned it down because it was too dark. "Then I saw the movie and, of course, I was like, 'Man I screwed up,'" the actor told *Empire* in 2010.



MICHAEL CLAYTON

Washington turned down the title role (taken by George Clooney) because first-timer Tony Gilroy was directing. "I was nervous... and I was wrong. It happens," he later said.



DA 5 BLOODS

Better Call Saul's Giancarlo Esposito revealed he was in talks for Spike Lee's Vietnam flick alongside Washington, Samuel L. Jackson and John David Washington. This father-son casting implies Denzel was set for Delroy Lindo's role. Scheduling conflicts did for the stellar line-up.

! SPOILER WARNING

INDISPENSABLE HOME ENTERTAINMENT [EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT]



Last Night Moves

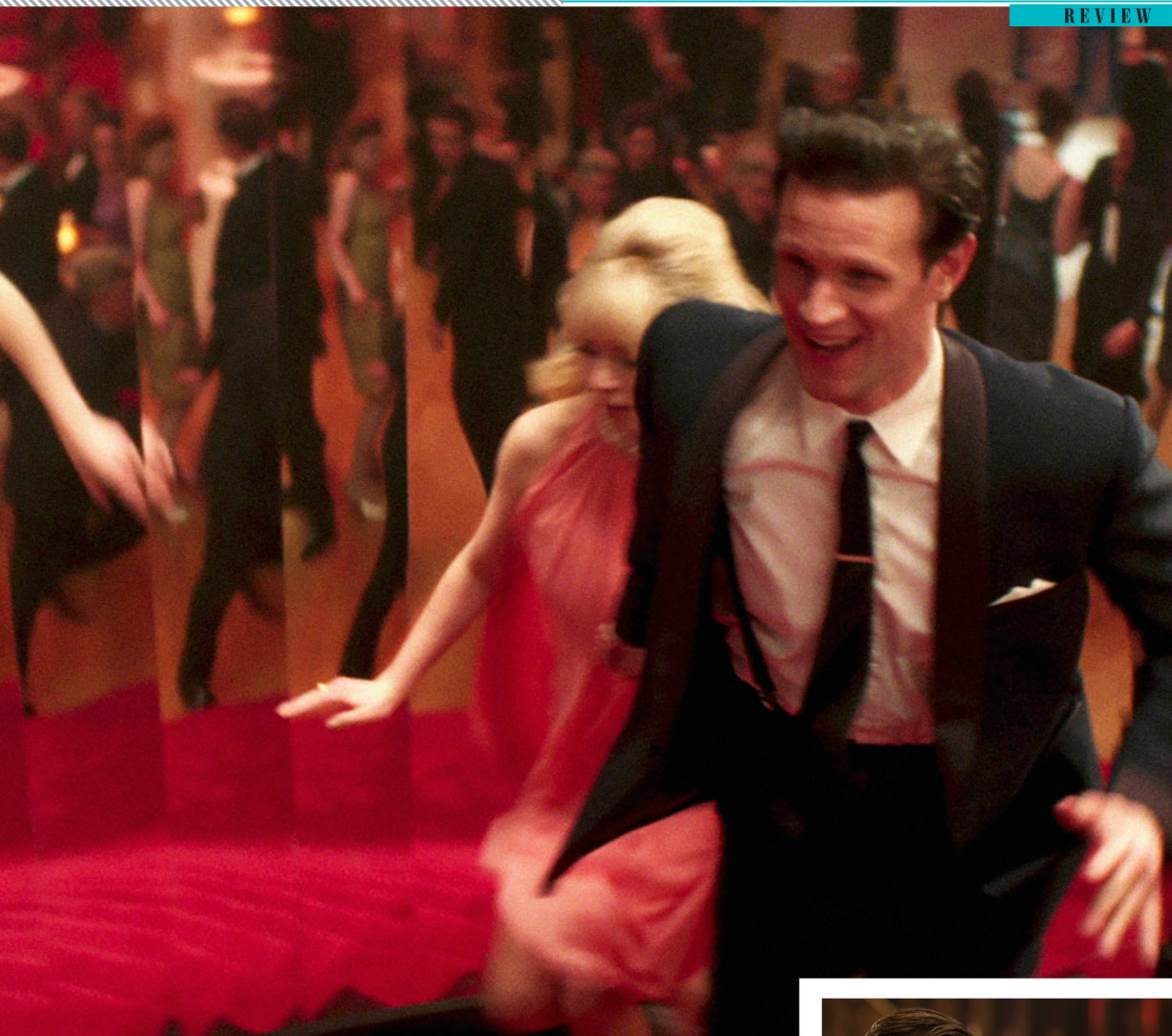
In an exclusive oral history, **EDGAR WRIGHT** and key cast and crew break down *Last Night In Soho's* already-iconic Café de Paris sequence

EDGAR WRIGHT'S *LAST Night In Soho*, as you might expect, doesn't skimp on the sumptuous visuals and earworming songs. But the two come together most thrillingly in what has already become the film's signature sequence, in the Café de Paris. It's here where, bookended by two Cilla Black tunes, heroine Eloise (Thomasin McKenzie) travels back in time to 1965 and finds herself in the famous nightclub, beguiled by a young wannabe starlet named Sandie (Anya Taylor-Joy). It contains meticulous design, innovative camerawork, invisible effects, and a rousing dance number between McKenzie, Taylor-Joy and Matt Smith as Eloise begins to

break the boundaries of reality. Here, Wright, Smith, McKenzie and a host of key crew-members tell us how they did it.

Edgar Wright, director/co-writer: This was probably one of the first visuals I had in my head before I'd written a word of the screenplay. One of the first ideas was to have this idea of living vicariously through somebody else's life in dreams. And the way to show that 'I'm me, but I look like somebody else', is with a mirror.

Mirrors play a huge part in *Last Night In Soho*. In this sequence, Eloise flits between



being part of the world to becoming a reflection of Sandie, looking on as she dazzles the room.

Wright: There are two things with the mirror effects. I'm not just trying to show off and come up with these amazing, magic-trick effects. It was a practical decision. The more we could do the mirror stuff for real, the better it was going to be for the actresses involved. We did every single mirror trick in the book.

When Eloise — and the audience — first encounters Sandie, it's as a reflection in the mirror outside the Café de Paris cloakroom, as an attendant takes her coat.

Tom Proctor, production visual-effects supervisor: It was boarded pretty meticulously but it wasn't clear when I joined the film how it was going to be executed. We concocted a way that we could have a mirror that would move away, and we employed twins.

Wright: When they come down to the lobby, what you see is a lobby set. When Oliver Phelps, playing the maitre d', walks in front of the camera, the mirror slides back to reveal a double set.

Marcus Rowland, production designer: A sliding mirror. You can't get any more lo-fi.

Wright: In the double set is Anya Taylor-Joy and James Phelps, Oliver's twin brother. The Phelps brothers are also the Weasley twins. I neglected to tell Thomasin and Anya that the Weasley twins were in the scene as well. They didn't recognise them at first, because their hair was brown. I said, "Oh, you know James and Oliver from *Harry Potter*," and Thomasin and Anya both had the same reaction. I may as well have said, "That's Leonardo DiCaprio."

Thomasin McKenzie: I just remember being very starstruck. The Weasley twins were there and I was freaking out. I really needed to be present in that moment but I was in *Harry Potter* Land.



Top: They do it with mirrors — Thomasin McKenzie, Anya Taylor-Joy and Matt Smith bend reality in *Last Night In Soho*. **Above:** Smith with Edgar Wright on set.

Rowland: We kept building more and more of the duplicate set because you realise, “My God, we need more.” You always start a bit optimistic that if you come in at that angle you’ll only see that section. But in rehearsal, more and more gets sneaked in. We practically did build the whole lobby in duplicate.

Proctor: When they go to tap the mirror, there’s not actually a mirror there. They’re poking a point in space that they agreed on. Visual effects helped by adding a sense of a mirror surface.

After that, Eloise and Sandie are constantly shown as reflections of each other, all done in-camera, not via CGI.

Wright: The shot where Anya is walking into the club down the stairs, and there’s the mirrored slats behind her and you see Thomasin going down at the same time, was a motion-control shot because there was no other way to do it. But Anya had the choreography set to the song, so [choreographer] Jen White would be going “Five, six, seven, eight...” and then Thomasin had to do the same thing.

McKenzie: That was done separately. Walking down that staircase, I was trying to act on the one hand and on the other hand I was having to remember the exact beats, the exact steps, the exact rhythm that Anya had walked down that staircase in.

Jennifer White, choreographer: A lot of the time Edgar had playback, which I found created an atmosphere that was inclusive. Even if I shouted above the music so that Thomasin could clearly hear me, everyone was on board. It gave Thomasin confidence as well. It felt like you were in the soundtrack.

McKenzie: Jenny was a personal saviour. She was my right-hand man, the whole time.

White’s most obvious contribution would be choreographing the dazzling, dizzying dance sequence that involves Smith’s Jack, Sandie and Eloise.

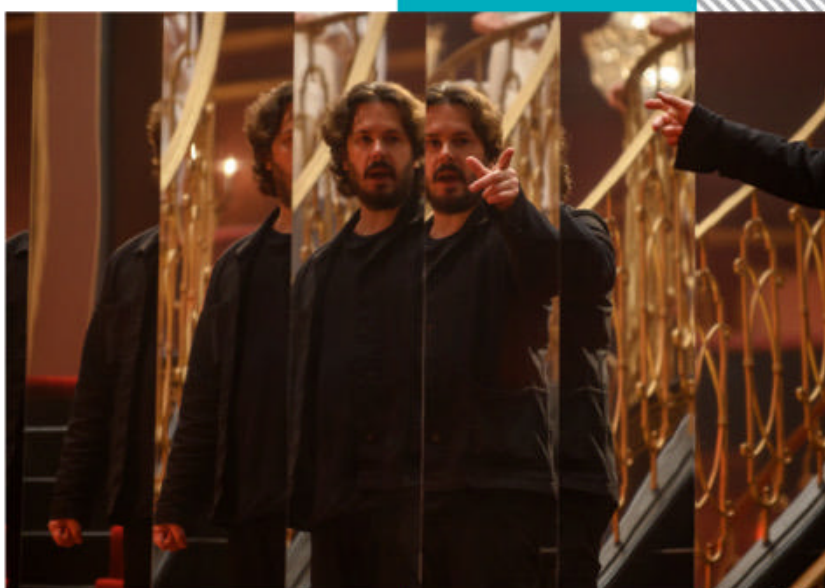
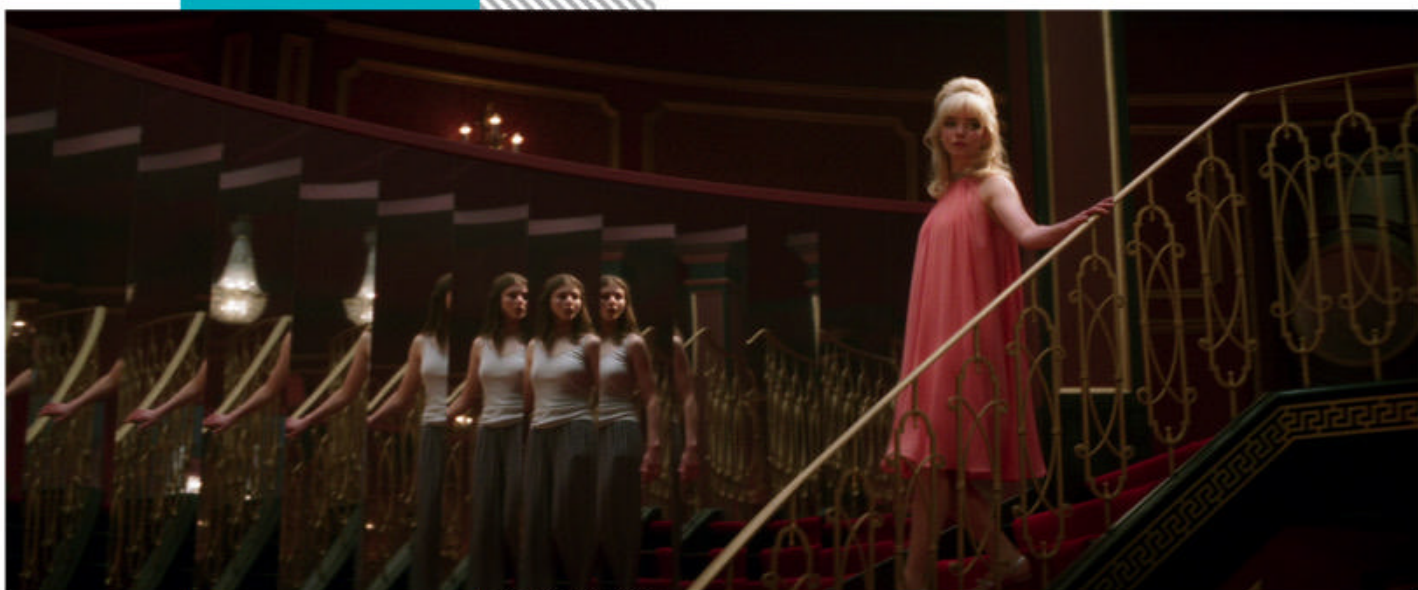
Wright: Eloise is an observer, but when the emotions ride really high, she jumps into the scene. It was written in the script that Anya starts dancing with Matt, and at a key moment in the choreography suddenly Eloise is there.

McKenzie: I started doing dance rehearsals in Wellington because I’m naturally not a great dancer, and I wanted to be able to show up with some kind of confidence.

Matt Smith: Jenny White was fabulous. We did a lot of rehearsals in a sort of school hall in Ealing. It came very naturally for Anya. I enjoyed it. And we added different flavours to it. The drink was always there. I thought it’d be cool to smoke and flick a cigarette.

Wright: In the storyboards, Eloise was going to be in Sandie’s costume and hair. And we did a rehearsal on the

Right: A reflective moment for Eloise and Sandie. **Below, top to bottom:** Take your partners; Step back in time; Man in the mirror.



Saturday, Thomasin was in the pink dress and hair, and it was ready to go. We asked Chris Bain, the Steadicam operator, to rehearse with us and Jennifer White did the choreography. We had done a rehearsal earlier without Thomasin and Anya, and the Thomasin double was brown-haired and the Anya double was blonde-haired. We recorded the shot and I went home and showed it to my girlfriend, and there was one transition where she replayed it over and over because it was so slick. And it was brunette to blonde. And Anya to Thomasin was blonde to blonde. And I was thinking, “This is a mistake. People won’t even know what’s happening.” So the day before we tried that sequence, I had to break it to costume and make-up.



McKenzie: They had made that pink dress for me. And there was a scene afterwards where I was wearing that. But I think it works better that I started off in my pyjamas and gradually Ellie and Sandie became more and more entwined.

The dance involves a number of transitions from Eloise to Sandie and back again. Wright wanted it presented as a single shot, and done as practically as possible.

Wright: Jennifer White had come up with a bunch of Texas switches.

White: We just tried to play and get the iPhone out and work on sneaky angles. We have to make sure that Matt is standing exactly there, and the camera is exactly there, and if he didn't twist his shoulders he wouldn't hide Anya or Thomasin. Working that out took time.

Wright: That's why they're all happening for real. I was like, "Well, let's just do all of them." So the shot you see is one uninterrupted take that goes all the way through. There's one Thomasin bit that is like an overlay. I said, "How can we do this without doing motion control?" Because it's a three-minute Steadicam shot where we've got to weave around really fluidly. Eventually, Tom Proctor said, "We can make this work, no green screen, no motion control." We called Chris Bain 'the Human Moco', doing the same part again and again with Matt and Thomasin.

Paul Machliss, editor: It was remarkable to



Top: Dancing the night away in the recreated ballroom of the Café de Paris at Leavesden Studios. **Above:** Director of photography Chung Chung-hoon eyes up a shot.

watch the four dancers, including Chris.

White: Chris is a genius. He knew exactly his marks. He moved so swiftly. He's a lean, tall guy, physically fit, so he could shift his body so fast with this massive machine. I'm so grateful we had him. It would have changed the whole concept. It might not have worked.

Chris Bain, Steadicam operator: By the time we were shooting it, I wasn't having to think about what move was coming next. By no means was my movement elegant behind the camera, I can tell you that much. I looked like an out-of-control spider. I was trying not to fall about laughing at what we were doing and what it must have looked like from the sidelines.

Wright: It's thrilling to watch. Thomasin is basically running around and down on her knees, and then up, and then Anya's down on her knees and they're literally running around the camera like that. It's super-sophisticated and lo-fi at the same time. In this day and age, people assume everything is stitches all the time. We did

a BAFTA thing and somebody said, "I have to give it up for Paul Machliss for the amazing editing in the dance number."

Machliss: I was happy watching it unfold. If there's any contribution, it's four or five months later when Edgar and I are in the cutting room, and we subtly assisted the camera position. We gave the framing a nudge. It's the one time where I'll proudly stand there and say it's almost none of my own work.

Smith: There's a lot of technical wizardry that takes place in the camera. There's a lot of basic puppeteering of actors hiding behind the lens, or hiding behind an operator, and popping up. We learned how best to hide and reveal ourselves. I enjoyed all the trickery.

McKenzie: It was pretty intense. I was terrified because it's done practically. I was chasing the camera for a bunch of it, trying not to be in the shot. And I was watching Chris, partly amazed and partly terrified of getting in his way. There was so much action and it would get very sweaty. The make-up artists were lovely, they always had fans on hand for us. But Chris never had a fan, so he would be dripping sweat. My gift to him was a handheld fan for him to take around.

Bain: Yes, a couple of months after the job she sent me a nice letter and a handheld fan. That was very cool.

Proctor: I think we did it about 17 times.

Machliss: We did it 12, 14 times maybe.

Bain: We only did six or seven takes.

Proctor: It's really cinema gold. It's a classic sequence. I was very glad to be a part of it.

Wright: It's those kind of shots you don't really know whether you're going to be able to pull off until you actually do it. It's that high-wire act — let's hope we get a take that really convinces because one wrong move of the finger would fuck it all up. I'm really proud of those shots.

Smith: People are really intrigued by it. They ask, "How did they do that?" I think it's quite nice that it's the good old-fashioned *puff-puff-bang* of Dr Theatre. **CHRIS HEWITT**

LAST NIGHT IN SOHO IS OUT NOW ON DIGITAL AND ON
31 JANUARY ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND 4K

Father (Arthur Ridley) and Mrs Owen (Grace Arnold) with an unwelcome visitor.

THE MASTERPIECE

We reassess the greatest films of all time, one film at a time

Went The Day Well?

IN MAY 1942, sometime between the Dunkirk evacuation and the Battle of Stalingrad, a troop of actors and crew members, under the command of a heavily accented Brazilian, gathered in the sleepy Buckinghamshire village of Turville to make a deceptively simple film with a distinctly odd title, drawn from a 1918 epigraph (“Went the day well? We died and never knew. But, well

or ill, Freedom, we died for you”) by John Maxwell Edmonds.

Expanded from Graham Greene’s 1940 short story *The Lieutenant Dies Last* and filmed as ‘They Came In Khaki’, *Went The Day Well?* (US title: *48 Hours*) begins with a fourth-wall-breaking introduction by the vicar of ‘Bramley End’. Standing by a churchyard memorial to German soldiers — German soldiers? In Buckinghamshire? In 1942? — he begins to relate a story about a Nazi invasion of his pastoral village, clearly a metaphorical microcosm of England itself. The ensuing tale is told, in anecdotal retrospect, from the point of view of an Allied victory, a boldly optimistic position given the course of the war at that juncture, with the turning points — Midway, El Alamein and Stalingrad — still months away.

“It was Saturday morning when those army lorries came rumbling along the road,” he tells us, as we flash back to a shot of the trucks arriving, carrying dozens of enemy parachutists masquerading as British soldiers billeted to Bramley End. The Germans’ plan, aided by a local sleeper agent (played to the hilt by Leslie Banks, whose World War I injury left him with facial scars befitting a Bond villain), is to jam British radio signals to facilitate an “airborne

and seaborne invasion” 48 hours later, making *Went The Day Well?*, as Penelope Houston noted in her BFI Film Classics text on the film, “the only British feature film made during the war to deal seriously... with the prospect of invasion.”

The villagers are initially, if grudgingly, accommodating. But isn’t it odd, the vicar’s daughter suggests, that one of the soldiers crosses his ‘sevens’ in the continental style while scoring a game of cards? And why does another display such casual brutality to a child evacuee? And while we’re ‘othering’ the newcomers, where did their commanding officer come by the bar of Viennese chocolate found in his kit bag? The audience is in on the conspiracy from the very beginning, and the film wastes no time in revealing it to the villagers: half an hour in, they are herded into the church, the village is barricaded, women are manhandled and threatened, and the then vicar is shot dead before his horrified congregation, after ringing out a warning on the church bells — a warning tragically misinterpreted by the home guard as a false alarm.

This shocking murder, at odds with the bucolic setting and its salt-of-the-earth inhabitants, is a mere taste of the savagery to



This page, clockwise from left: Villagers Tom (Frank Lawton) and Jim Sturry (Norman Pierce); C.V. France as ill-fated vicar Reverend Ashton; Postmistress Mrs Collins (Muriel George) with shop clerk Daisy (Patricia Hayes).

come, an unflinching depiction of violent acts that remain shocking to this day, such as when the local postmistress buries a hatchet in the head of an invader, before being bayoneted to death, or when the school's headmistress runs from the room with a live hand grenade, saving the children in her class but blowing herself to smithereens. *Dad's Army* it ain't.

With its ruthless, cold-blooded Germans and brave, socially conscious Brits, pulling together to see off the Hun — complete with future national treasure Thora Hird wielding a machine gun — *Went The Day Well?* feels like a powerful propaganda film, yet it wasn't an official one. By the time the film went into production, and even as civil servants were mulling over how to present the prospect of a German invasion to the British public, for fear that "if they were suddenly to find Germans in their back gardens, there might be a slight danger of panic", Hitler's 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union had already rendered the chances of an assault on England vanishingly small. In fact, producer Michael Balcon battled not only the Ministry Of Information, bafflingly indifferent to the persuasive power of film, but also his Ealing Studios bosses, who felt — not unreasonably — that the public wanted escapist comedies (which, after the war, would put Ealing on the map) rather than Boche-under-your-bed thrillers.

Balcon can be credited with laying the foundations for the masterpiece that *Went The Day Well?* became, largely for his decision to hire the maverick Brazilian Alberto Cavalcanti to direct it. A year earlier, the pair had collaborated on a short propaganda film about Italian leader Benito Mussolini (co-scripted, bizarrely, by future Labour Party leader Michael Foot), and Balcon was besotted with Cavalcanti's artistry, intuiting that this leftfield choice of self-described "surrealist with a tendency towards realism" would lend an outsider's perspective to the script's depiction of a typical English village and its archetypal denizens; surely no native would have had the objectivity — much

less the audacity — to juxtapose "More tea, vicar?"-style dialogue with sudden outbursts of almost sadistic violence.

Far from being hailed as a masterpiece upon its UK release in December 1942, *Went The Day Well?* was largely dismissed by critics, trampled in the rush to laud contemporaries such as Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent*, *Saboteur* and *Shadow Of A Doubt*. It has enjoyed a critical renaissance, albeit one that's been glacially paced. It was the subject of a BFI Classics volume, published on the film's 50th anniversary in 1992 (although even then, Penelope Houston, the author, described it as "not by any reasonable standard of measurement a major film"). And it's had an impact on other filmmakers; its influence arguably stretches to *Straw Dogs*, *Shaun Of The Dead* and (especially) *Inglourious Basterds*, a movie which also took liberties with how things played out in World War II.

But it really wasn't until the early part of this century that critics seemed to finally cotton on to its subversive, surrealist brilliance, a film which, as one critic put it, "establishes... the ultimate bucolic English scene, then takes an almost sadistic delight in tearing it to bloody shreds in an orgy of shockingly blunt, matter-of-fact violence."

Of course, there was no German invasion of Britain during World War II. But as *Went The Day Well?* turns 80, "the Battle of Bramley End" stands as a boldly optimistic depiction of the indefatigable British spirit. As the vicar says at the film's end, "We're proud of ourselves here — proud we had the chance to do our bit."

DAVID HUGHES

WENT THE DAY WELL? IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL



BRINGING HOME THE BALCON

THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF THE HEAD OF EALING STUDIOS



MICHAEL BALCON WAS invited, by an associate named Reginald Baker, to become the head of Ealing Studios in 1938. Ten years later, he was knighted. It was a fair reflection of the impact the Birmingham-born Balcon made in just a decade at the helm of Ealing, where he oversaw production on pretty much every Ealing film considered to be a classic, from *The Ladykillers* (below) to *Dead Of Night* (which reunited him with Alberto Cavalcanti).

Ealing accounts for the bulk of Balcon's prodigious output (the IMDb lists him as the producer of 267 movies), but it doesn't cover everything. Before Ealing, he formed several companies which allowed him to foster his eye for upcoming talent, including Alfred Hitchcock. Balcon produced a number of The Master's early movies, including his debut, *The Pleasure Garden*, *The Lodger: A Story Of The London Fog*, and *The 39 Steps*.

After Ealing was sold, by Rank, to the BBC in 1955, Balcon left (setting up a company called Ealing Films, which isn't confusing at all) and continued to work with young filmmakers. His last credit was *The Long And The Short And The Tall* (directed by Barry Norman's father, Leslie) in 1961, although he was an uncredited executive producer on *Tom Jones* (1963).

However, it wasn't just his on-screen work that was noteworthy — during World War II, Balcon helped a number of people, including *The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari* star Conrad Veidt, escape from Nazi Germany, while you might recognise his grandson, one Daniel Day-Lewis, the son of Balcon's daughter, Jill, and Cecil Day-Lewis.

Balcon died in 1977. Two years later came maybe the ultimate tribute: each year, when someone (be it Ken Loach, Monty Python, or Andy Serkis) wins the BAFTA for Outstanding British Contribution To Cinema, they lift the trophy in Balcon's honour. **CHRIS HEWITT**

Going the distance

DOLPH LUNDGREN talks us through the turbulent contours of his incredible career ILLUSTRATION RUSSELL MOORCROFT

HIS ARRIVAL WAS explosive. In the mid-'80s, Sylvester Stallone's third sequel to *Rocky* needed an embodiment of Soviet might, and Dolph Lundgren — despite hailing from Stockholm, not Moscow — fitted the bill perfectly, staring down at Stallone with contemptuous cool, then upper-cutting his way through the astonishing final-reel bout. Lundgren became an instant A-lister. And though the decades ahead were, aptly enough, rocky, with times of hardship and a fallow stretch at the box office, Lundgren persists — still an ass-kicker at 64. Here, he gives us insights into his wild ride.

ROCKY IV (1985)

Competition for the role of dastardly Drago was fierce, but the unknown Lundgren wouldn't take no for an answer, sending Stallone photos of himself in boxing gear even after being rejected for being too tall. "Finally, it was down to me and two Russian guys," he says. "But their acting was over-the-top — they kind of did a Russian Mr. T. I decided to play him very cool. Internal. I saw the recut version the other week and it's quite powerful. Drago comes across a little more as a human being. You realise that he was manipulated." *Rocky IV* literally changed Lundgren's life overnight, at the Los Angeles premiere on 21 November 1985. "I was with Grace Jones, who I was dating at the time, and as I walked up the red carpet, people were shooing me out of the way to take pictures of her. On the way out, people were taking pictures of me. It just blew me off my feet."

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE (1987)

Lundgren attempted to lighten his image with this toy-inspired fantasy. But embodying

Left to right: *The Expendables*; *Universal Soldier*; *The Punisher*; *Castle Falls*; *Rocky IV*; *Dark Angel*; *Aquaman*; *Masters Of The Universe*.

He-Man wasn't an easy experience. "It was really hard for me to go from being a Soviet bad-guy to an American hero overnight," he says. "There was a lot of pressure. And it was kind of dicey to play a toy in those days, or any kind of character wearing a stamp for a costume." One day on set, he had an unexpected encounter. "I was walking around between takes, all muscles and leather straps, and this hot little girl comes up to me eating a popsicle. Well, it was Madonna. She was doing a music video there and really checking me out. But nothing came about. I sent her flowers one time when I was in Cannes after that, hoping something was gonna happen, but it didn't. You can't win 'em all!"

THE PUNISHER & DARK ANGEL (1989/1990)

With *Masters* derided by critics, Lundgren went in a new direction, dyeing his hair black for these

smaller, grittier thrillers. Though both are these days regarded as cult classics (*Dark Angel* celebrated for Lundgren's immortal exchange with an alien: "I come in peace", "And you go in pieces, asshole!"), at the time they languished at the box office. "I was disappointed," he admits. "Even though there were fights, I was trying to move out of that action space, to get away from the blond kid. *Dark Angel* was the first time I played a regular guy who had a girlfriend and things like that. When they underperformed, I was really upset. But I had to just toughen up and keep moving forward."

UNIVERSAL SOLDIER (1992)

An experience Jean-Claude Van Damme once described as "100 per cent pure beef", the shoot for this pumped-up Roland Emmerich sci-fi film saw he and Lundgren get extremely competitive



Illustration: Russell Moorcroft



as rival cyborgs. “There were scenes where we were bare-chested in the same frame, and you kind of feel pressured to work out more and be in better shape. Yeah, there was competition there.” The real rivalry turned into fake rivalry on the red carpet for the premiere in Cannes, where Van Damme engineered a pretend brawl to whip up publicity. “He cooked that up before we left the hotel,” laughs Lundgren. “He pushed me, and I pushed him back a little bit. Then one of his security guards jumped in and knocked my wife back, and I got a little pissed for real!”

THE EXPENDABLES (2010)

“When Sly called me for that film, I hadn’t been on the big screen for 15 years,” Lundgren remembers. It was a big moment for the star, after a long stretch making movies that bypassed cinemas. And an emotional reunion with the

man who had changed his life once already. “I still have fun doing it, especially because of Stallone,” says the star, who will return as majestically monickered hardman Gunner Jensen in *The Expendables 4*. “It’s kind of a blast from the past — some British Army guy hands you an assault rifle with full blanks in it, and off you go.”

AQUAMAN (2018)

Playing the king of an underwater realm might sound like a silly lark. But for Lundgren, getting the part of Nereus was a huge deal, allowing him to flex his dramatic muscles, not just his actual ones. “It meant a lot that the director believed in me,” he says. “It was like a new beginning. In the new one I have a bigger role and I really feel part of the team. I also like the fact that a lot of the fans are very, very young — their parents maybe

weren’t even born when I did *Rocky IV*. It’s satisfying to feel relevant.”

CASTLE FALLS (2021)

Lundgren is also an accomplished director, with six films under his belt. *Command Performance* was ‘*Die Hard* at a rock concert’; his new one, *Castle Falls*, sees him and Scott Adkins fighting baddies in a building rigged for demolition. “I used to direct my brothers and sisters, running around doing cowboys and Indians,” he remembers. “I get ideas from all kinds of places: Stallone, Clint Eastwood... I saw a lot of Bergman movies when I was a kid, so I started watching them after I decided to direct more.” A reboot of *The Seventh Seal*, with Dolph versus Death? We know who we’d bet on. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

CASTLE FALLS IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL

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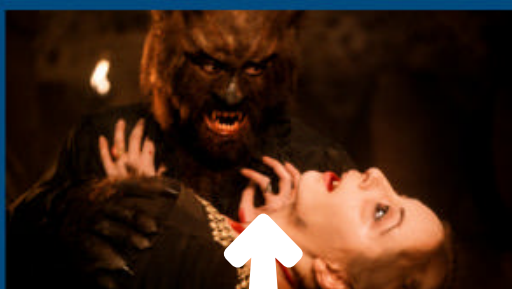
KIM NEWMAN

The critic and novelist selects the month's weirdest home-ent releases

TWO COLUMNS AGO, I rounded up recent vampires. Now, it's the turn of perennial poor-monster-relation, the werewolf.

The high concept of Patrick Rea's *I Am Wolf* (formerly *I Am Lisa*) is *I Spit On Your Grave* mashed up with *Ginger Snaps*. Shy, bespectacled Lisa (Kristen Vaganos) runs foul of thugs who are protected by interesting, crooked female sheriff Deborah (Manon Halliburton). Roughed-up, raped and dumped in the woods, Lisa survives wolfen mauling and is nursed back to health by mystery wise woman Mary (Cinnamon Schultz). Made over as a clear-sighted, confident, fanged and taloned werewolf, she starts revenge-ripping through the ranks of the villains. Vaganos is excellent as the put-upon doormat who becomes a sleek, sexy, killer beastess, and the film offers a nice collision of woodland folklore and small-town corruption.

Made before but arriving after the lively, enjoyable film inspired by the computer game *Werewolves Within* is Steven Morana and Chris Green's *Beast Within*, a metafictional monster movie set at the launch party for a new edition of classic card game 'Werewolves Awaken'. A soap-opera cast of pretty people forget their silly problems as soon as guts start spilling on the floor at the remote estate of unethical games tycoon Brian Fenris (Art Hindle). In the grand old tradition of *The Beast Must Die*, it's a tricky whodunnit as well as a creature-feature. The monster effects are okay and there are script felicities — such as a speech by one hunter about the way social media has evolved into a tribe, but



CULT HERO OF THE MONTH PAUL NASCHY

Burly Spanish character actor Paul Naschy (1934-2009) was so determined to become a horror star that he scripted his first vehicle, *La Marca Del Hombre Lobo* (1968). Released globally as *Hell's Creatures* or *Frankenstein's Bloody Terror*, the film set off a mini-boom for gothic horror in Spain, not a country which traditionally made monster movies. Naschy returned to the role of Polish werewolf Waldemar Daninsky in many wildly inventive, doggily endearing films, including *Dr. Jekyll And The Werewolf*, *The Werewolf And The Yeti* (once deemed a 'video nasty'), *The Beast And The Magic Sword* (set in samurai-era Japan) and *Buenas Noches, Señor Monstruo* (a kids' musical). Naschy also played Dracula, a mummy and an exorcist, and eventually directed as well as wrote his films. Among his choice titles: *Horror Rises From The Tomb*, *House Of Psychotic Women* and *A Dragonfly For Each Corpse*.

failed in one crucial aspect ("You forgot to keep the wolves out").

Ludovic and Zoran Boukherma's *Teddy* is an oblique homage to Hammer's *The Curse Of The Werewolf*. Bitten by something in the woods, 19-year-old, short-fused misfit Teddy (Anthony Bajon) sprouts hair from inconvenient places — his tongue, an eyeball — and has blackouts during which he gnaws on animals. When his out-of-his-league, younger girlfriend Rebecca (Christine Gautier) dumps him, something monstrous happens at the local school's bingo night. Bajon is excellent as the unlikeable yet human monster, and the film has a real feel for dead-end provincial life. It eventually delivers a full-on wolf-out,

but privileges subtler, creepier horrors and a particularly French melancholy.

Shawn Linden's earthy, woodsy suspense film *Hunter Hunter* casts Devon Sawa — who's weathered into an interesting character actor — as a modern-day fur-trapper who drags his wife (Camille Sullivan) and daughter (Summer H. Howell) into the wilderness. Animal and human predators come prowling around their off-the-grid cabin. It isn't exactly a werewolf movie, though note that the rogue wolf disappears just as Nick Stahl shows up as an ambiguous stranger called Lou. This tough, haunting little picture — *Leave No Trace* versus the Big Bad Wolf — doesn't pan out the way you expect, delivering an extremely gruesome yet poetic finale.

If you seek out something called *Werewolf In A Womens Prison*, you give up any right to complain about shoddy acting, ropey videography, copious gore and nudity, a wildly derivative script and a big, hulking, hairy monster outfit with Christmas-tree lights for eyes. Star Victoria De Mare and auteur Jeff Leroy, the Dietrich and von Sternberg of no-budget schlock, reteamed for *Dracula In A Women's Prison* and *Frankenstein In A Women's Prison*, which at least have the budget for possessive apostrophes in the titles.

Bailey-Bond Film Club



Censor writer-director **PRANO BAILEY-BOND** takes us inside the bloody guts of her excellent BBFC-inspired horror

PRANO BAILEY-BOND WON'T settle for anything less than the right kind of foliage. For her directorial debut *Censor*, the filmmaker went to extraordinary lengths to intricately, accurately deliver a slice of 1980s-set meta horror, from lovingly made VHS covers to just the right type of leaves on a forest floor. Speaking with *Empire*, she breaks down the forensic detail that went into crafting the film.

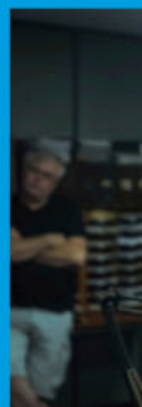
CASTING

Niamh Algar plays Enid, a wilting film censor who discovers a video nasty that she believes stars her missing sister. Bailey-Bond describes the character as “a coiled spring”, who at the end of her character-arc transforms into “an explosion of emotions” when the trail runs cold and her world unravels. She hadn’t written the part with anyone in mind, but Algar, who Bailey-Bond had first seen in Shane Meadows’ *The Virtues*, made her mark on the director from her first reading. “She made total sense of the scenes in a way that not everybody does,”

Bailey-Bond recalls. “She tunes into the rhythm and depth of the words that you’ve written, and she has an ability to put thought on screen, which is what I needed.”

COSTUMES

Bailey-Bond was determined to do away with the shoulder pads and Lycra readily associated with the era. “It was important that we were creating a world that was in line with oppressive Thatcher’s Britain, not *Top Of The Pops*,” she explains. With Enid, the clothes, which were synced to the production design and cinematography, change to reflect her losing grip on reality. “At the beginning of the film, there’s the sense of her being part of the furniture. Then as she makes her psychological descent into the video-nasty world, we start to see shifts in colour and lighting.” Both Algar and costume designer Saffron Cullane simultaneously came up with another visual aid to tell Enid’s story: “They both said that she should have glasses to make her a subverted superhero. She’s on a crusade to



protect society from the ills of the video nasty, but when there's a shift in how she sees the films, the glasses come off."

PROPS AND LOCATIONS

Each set was packed with detail, including a fully stocked video-rental store, complete with made-up VHS covers created especially for the film. "We had a graphics guy called Video Matt design all these big, fake posters and some of the covers, explains Bailey-Bond. "There's a film called 'The Day The World Began' that Enid picks out that foreshadows what happens in the rest of the film. It's like an Easter egg." The censor office in which Enid works was inspired by the British Board of Film Classification, and was built from scratch to mirror its partially underground setting. Then there was the forest, just outside of Leeds, where the film would reach its bloody climax. The crew had visited multiple woodlands ahead of time, to find just the right combination of cinematic and surreal, right down to the leaves on the ground. "There was something very apocalyptic about the floor," she says. "I imagined those animations you watch as a kid where the world splits in two, and you've got a family divided. There was something that reminded me of those kinds of scenes."

FX

Practical effects were used whenever possible, with Bailey-Bond recruiting ongoing collaborator Dan Martin (*Possessor*, *High-Rise*) to bring the gore. "Because I'm a child of the '80s, there's something so much more visceral and exciting about actually seeing that it's there on camera," she says. In a particularly gruesome scene, Michael Smiley's shady film producer dies when his head becomes impaled on one of his trophies. "That man is made out of charisma," she says fondly. "It was an uncomfortable position to be in and he was great. We had half of this award and this blood line going into his mouth so that fake blood could spurt out. So he's actually spitting out fake blood in that moment." This is why Oscars have rounded edges.

SCORE

"I was listening to *The Fog*'s soundtrack a lot when I was writing the script," says Bailey-Bond. "[Composer] Emilie Levienaise-Farrouch and I had a love for that score, so with that, John Carpenter and Goblin, we had some references from the period." However, the pair were not interested in making a score that felt like a pastiche. "It was about tuning into Enid's trauma," she says. "I remember saying to Emily really early on that deep sounds that felt like they were coming from her belly, traumatic 'belly sounds', felt really appropriate. She ended up using her own voice, then processing it to the point where you almost don't recognise it's vocals." **BETH WEBB**

CENSOR IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL

Clockwise from main: Life mirrors art for film censor Enid (Niamh Algar); Director Prano Bailey-Bond; Enid at work; And with parents George (Andrew Havill) and June (Clare Holman).

MARK KERMODE'S MOVIE MUSIC

THE CRITIC AND SCALA RADIO PRESENTER ON THE WORLD OF CINEMATIC SOUNDTRACKS

THIS MONTH FIVE FILMMAKERS WHO HAVEN'T JUST DIRECTED MOVIES, BUT ALSO COMPOSED THE MUSIC



1. CHARLIE CHAPLIN

Despite receiving honorary Academy Awards in 1929 and 1972, the groundbreaking cinema pioneer won his only competitive Oscar in 1973 — as a composer of the music for 1952's *Limelight*. The movie had been pulled from US cinemas when Chaplin was accused of Communist sympathies (the FBI called him a "parlour Bolshevik") in the '50s, and qualified for Oscar consideration when it was finally released in LA in 1972. Chaplin, who was self-taught on the piano, violin and cello, couldn't read sheet music and needed the assistance of professional composers for the many scores he conjured up, for both new and re-released films.

2. JOHN CARPENTER

The horror maven (whose father was a music teacher) said that his ear-worm 5/4 title-theme for *Halloween* was knocked out as a two-finger ditty that worked because of its simplicity. It has since become one of the most recognisable horror themes in the history of cinema — up there with Bernard Herrmann's stabby *Psycho* strings. Carpenter has composed or co-composed many of his own film scores, including *The Fog*, *Escape*

From New York and Big Trouble In Little China.

3. SALLY POTTER

The renowned polymath trained as a dancer and choreographer. No wonder, then, that music has always been such a key part of the vision for her films. As well as writing and directing, she composed or co-composed the scores for *Orlando*, *The Tango Lesson*, *Yes* and *The Roads Not Taken*.

4. ALEJANDRO AMENÁBAR

Spanish-Chilean filmmaker Amenábar is best known as the writer-director of the ghostly chiller *The Others*, and the Spanish-language fantasy-mystery *Open Your Eyes* — the latter of which was remade by Cameron Crowe as the Tom Cruise sci-fi vehicle *Vanilla Sky*.

But Amenábar is also an accomplished tunesmith, having served as a composer on both of those movies, along with several others including *The Sea Inside*.

5. CLINT EASTWOOD

Actor, director, producer, composer, pianist — Eastwood clearly walks the full length of the creative counter. His feature credits as composer include *Mystic River*, *Flags Of Our Fathers*, *Changeling*, *Hereafter* and *J. Edgar*.

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Makin' whoopee:
An electrifying
Michelle Pfeiffer
as Susie.



The Fabulous Baker Boys

AS BEFITS A film about throwback nightclub acts, writer-director Steve Kloves came up with *The Fabulous Baker Boys*' most memorable scene — torch singer Susie Diamond (Michelle Pfeiffer) slinking through 'Makin' Whoopee' on a piano played by Jack Baker (Jeff Bridges) — in the wee small hours. "I remember writing it at two or three in the morning," recalls Kloves. "It's just a paragraph, four or five lines, but it captured the spirit of the moment." The scene was prompted by a script note from veteran screenwriter Alvin Sargent (*Paper Moon*, the Raimi *Spider-Man* trilogy), who suggested, according to Kloves, that Jack and Susie "needed a moment where you feel like they're set free, a moment of joy." After Kloves rewrote the script to get the other Baker boy — Beau Bridges' Frank — out of the picture, Susie's writhing on a grand piano set the buttoned-down central characters on a new, highly charged path through the power of music. "I always said it was foreplay," says Kloves.

The proposed scene initially made its star deeply uncomfortable. "Michelle was like, 'This is going to be corny,'" says Kloves. "[But] because I had already gotten through the this-could-be-corny stage, I was absolutely steadfast: 'No, this is gonna work. It's gonna be great.'" For Kloves, key to the scene's success was choreographer Peggy Holmes, who kept the sultry moves "within the realm of reality", but the filmmaker is adamant that

"it's all Michelle at the end of the day. She's got to put on the dress, get on the piano with the high heels and make it work."

The idea to cover the song in a 360-degree camera-move came from *GoodFellas* DP Michael Ballhaus, who told Kloves he did a circular tracking shot in every film. "I didn't want to do some Scorsese move for my first film," says Kloves. "Then Michael said, 'What about the scene on the piano?' And I go, 'Okay, that's interesting.'" Filming at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles, the shot stretched the ingenuity of the crew — look out for the camera flare that hides a huge scaffolding rig — but also the modesty of the star. "Michelle will tell you the biggest challenge was about her not exposing herself, because I don't believe she was wearing underwear in that dress," says Kloves. "She had to worry about that."

The shot is broken up with cutaways to Jack, the audience and then Susie stepping off the piano. The edits remain a deep regret of Kloves. "We didn't need to cut and we do. It's got probably eight, nine seconds where conventional wisdom says it's dead time, though it's not because it's Michelle Pfeiffer. We have a take where there's no cut, with her walking down the piano. We overthought it." Criterion Collection, any chance of a director's cut sometime soon? **IAN FREER**

THE FABULOUS BAKER BOYS IS OUT NOW
ON DVD

INSTANT TRIVIA



1

To learn to play piano, Jeff Bridges had a portable keyboard on location and studied a video of the film's composer Dave Grusin, the actor mimicking the musician's movements.

2

When Michelle Pfeiffer rehearsed the scene she wore pads on her knees and elbows for protection.

3

According to Kloves, Pfeiffer had "three or four stage hands" waiting to catch her when she stepped down from the piano. "She was worried and I think rightfully so," remembers Kloves.

4

The scene took six hours to shoot. "I think we did six takes but we had it after three," says Kloves. "We just did a few more."

Alamy



!
SPOILER
WARNING

THE VIEWING GUIDE

A deep dive into the
must-see moments from
the month's big release

Malignant

ONCE YOU'VE SEEN *Malignant*, chances are it won't leave your head. Which is somewhat apt, as James Wan's demented horror movie is based around one of the most audacious twists in recent memory; a gloriously ghoulish spin on that old horror trope, 'the call is coming from inside the building'. Here, Wan and the film's screenwriter, Akela Cooper, talk about the standout moments from their *giallo*-inspired, gore-soaked thriller about a woman who finds herself stalked by her kill-crazy imaginary friend...

THE OPENING

The film begins with a flashback to the '80s, in which Dr Weaver (Jacqueline McKenzie), head of the Simion Research Hospital, is witness to a particularly bloody rampage by an unseen patient named Gabriel. It has flashes of the similar opening to Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator*, but Cooper — who came on board as writer, with

the original idea/story for the film coming from Wan and his wife, Ingrid Bisu — says that is entirely coincidental. "That was an addition by James," she says. "He wanted that brilliant cold opening to set the tone for the movie, and to take the background of these horrible experiments and pull it to the forefront."

GOING SLIGHTLY MADISON

Years later, we meet Madison (Annabelle Wallis), who, after losing her baby following a vicious assault by her scumbag husband, finds that she is being stalked by Gabriel, a shadowy and violent presence who, somehow, seems to be the manifestation of Madison's old imaginary childhood friend. Gabriel embarks upon a cycle of vengeance, killing anyone who has wronged Madison (including her husband). And, thanks to a psychic link shared by the two, Madison finds herself at every crime scene, powerless to stop Gabriel from wreaking bloody havoc. "She's there, she's frozen," explains Cooper. "And when you have James Wan, it's like, 'Okay, there's something supernatural going on here.' It's a brilliant

misdirect. And when you get the explanation of what's happening, it still makes sense without the audience being cheated." More on that soon...

TROPHY KILL

"James wanted a weapon no-one had ever seen, that could be iconic," laughs Cooper of the scene where Gabriel, in the midst of his bloodthirsty bucket list, bumps off a victim with one of their own awards. "I did research on various medical instruments used to cut bone and stuff like that, and then James made the decision to make it the award." Never give this man an Oscar. God knows what he would be able to do with it.

FREE PARKING

Malignant's tone has been hard for some to fathom. Is its overly melodramatic aspect deliberate, or accidental? In other words, were Wan and Cooper in on the joke? Yes, they say. Exhibit A in their defence: a sequence in which Madison's younger sister, Sydney (Maddie Hasson), ventures to the now-abandoned hospital to gather clues about Gabriel. Only, when she



gets there, she decides to park right on the edge of a cliff for no discernible reason. “That was not in the script,” laughs Cooper. “I had her pulling up to this dark, decrepit sanatorium at the front door. But that was James. He wants audiences to know it’s one of those fun ’80s horror movies.”

THE TWIST

In a double-pronged attack, cutting back and forth between Madison’s sister and adopted mum watching a VHS tape of Dr Weaver performing an operation on a young Madison, and an ever more stressed-out Madison, in the police-station holding cell, being taunted by her cell mates, Wan finally reveals the truth. Gabriel isn’t an imaginary friend at all, but a mutant teratoma that has been living inside of, and feeding off, Madison for years. Reawakened by the bump on Madison’s head, he’s back and out for blood. There was no psychic link — when Madison felt that she was seeing visions of the murders, it’s because she was there, trapped in her own body as Gabriel took it for a topsy-turvy test drive. “Structurally,

that was a tricky one to get right,” admits Wan. “Kudos to Akela and to my editor, Kirk M. Morri. There are two reveals, so how do we do it in such a way that you get the first pop and then, on top of that, here’s another one. That’s the double-fisting, if you will, that makes it cool.” Blimey.

COP SHOP MASSACRE

Once Gabriel is revealed, Wan isn’t afraid to go for great big dollops of gore, as the teratoma terror goes on a rampage inside the police station, using inhuman super-strength to kill all of his cellmates (including a wonderfully acerbic Zoë Bell). “That moment is really about his character just letting loose,” says Wan. “And after the last few years of making stuff like brooding, haunted-house ghost stories, I just wanted to explode back to my *Saw* days, letting it rain.” It’s a veritable downpour. In the script, Cooper describes it as “a hurricane of blood and guts”. In order to give Gabriel’s movements a suitably unsettling vibe, Wan shot it in a unique way. “The fact that the entire holding cell was done in reverse is mind-blowing,” he laughs.

“I can’t wait for the behind-the-scenes of that sequence to finally come out.”

THE ENDING

Madison and Gabriel engage in a psychic duel on some sort of astral plane (with shades of *Scanners*), Madison eventually locking Gabriel away in a mental prison. Cooper’s initial plan wasn’t quite as triumphant. “The original ending was super-bleak,” she laughs. “It was essentially Madison sacrificing herself to save her sister by shooting herself in the back of the head, and Gabriel. And you cut to a couple of months later, Madison is in another facility, they’ve managed to save some of her brain, and you go off with the question of, ‘Is Gabriel going to start rebuilding himself again?’” Despite disappointing box office, we may yet find out. “It would be incredible to tell the story of the Simion Research Facility,” says Wan. “I love the idea that there’s a hospital that has all these weird, wonderful people that have interesting abilities.” Maybe there’s life in this one yet. **CHRIS HEWITT**

MALIGNANT IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY, 4K AND DIGITAL

THE RANKING

Four *Empire* writers.
Ten movies.
Ordered definitively.

Tom Cruise movies

Chris: When did we first discover Tom Cruise?

Ben: The *Mission* films were always a big deal. I grew up with him as Tom Cruise: Action Star, but he's done a lot of things through his career, starting off as that cocky upstart, then into intense character performances, and then ascending to a new level of action insanity.

Beth: For me, it was *Jerry Maguire*. I could have watched other films of his, but they were quite mature. *Risky Business* was called risky for a reason.

Helen: I remember the first time hearing about him was my mum telling me about *Top Gun*. They'd been to the cinema the night before.

Chris: Did she wake you up in the middle of the night? "Helen, there's a young man whose ego is writing cheques his body can't cash!"

Helen: And the first one I saw

was *Top Gun*.

Chris: That's the movie that made him Tom Cruise. Which is why your mum woke you up.

Ben: It has incredible flying sequences, it has honky-tonk piano, it has volleyball and incredible sunsets. And you believe him as a character called Maverick.

Beth: I think the difference with *Top Gun* and his other roles up until then is that he's trying very hard to appear like he's not trying. It's an incredibly laidback, arrogant performance, which takes a lot of work. It's blinding stardom in that film.

Ammon: I love how cheesy it is. It's so much fun to watch.

Chris: *Top Gun*, weirdly, is a movie I took a long time to connect with. I loved *Rain Man* and *A Few Good Men*, but it was that double whammy in 1996 of *Jerry Maguire* and *Mission: Impossible* that got me.

Helen: I love that after *Top Gun*, instead of partying like crazy he goes to work with Martin Scorsese and Paul Newman, and grows a giant bouffant.

Ben: *The Color Of Money* is absolutely amazing. It's low-key top-tier Martin Scorsese, and you get that lovely dynamic of him playing off Paul Newman.

Chris: What do we think of *Rain Man*?

Helen: I think there's an argument to be made that he was robbed at the Oscars, and that his performance has aged better than Dustin Hoffman's.

Chris: He wasn't even nominated. In fact, there's an argument to be made that he should have won an Oscar by now. He's been nominated three times, for *Born On The Fourth Of July*, *Jerry Maguire* and *Magnolia*. For *Magnolia*, he lost to Michael Caine for *The Cider House Rules*. And

OUR CRITICS



CHRIS HEWITT
When he ranks, he reigns.



HELEN O'HARA
She can handle the truth.



BEN TRAVIS
What's done is done when he says it's done.



AMON WARMANN
He's quietly judging you.



BETH WEBB
Turns out Tom had her at hello.



Illustration: Jacey

somehow inferior. As long as the movies he's making right now are of the quality of *Rogue Nation*, *Fallout* and *Edge Of Tomorrow*, I'm happy for him to keep going. Should we talk about the *Mission* franchise?

Helen: I genuinely want to interview his insurance adjuster.

Chris: It's just a man who's got no hair left.

Ben: *Mission 2* is the most 2000 movie ever made. They give you spectacle, they give you story, they give you incredible action.

Chris: There's a cigarette-paper's width between *Rogue Nation* and *Fallout* for me. And I love the first *Mission*. It's just an espionage movie. The action high-point is a bloke throwing a piece of chewing-gum at a fish tank. And that great bit where Cruise is hanging from the ceiling, trying not to sweat.

Ben: That was a real thing in the '90s: Tom Cruise's Forehead Sweat. In *The Firm*, he's trying to escape from Tobin Bell, and his forehead is dripping.

Amon: I went for *Fallout*. It's the best one. The action is just incredible and you actually get into the psyche of Ethan Hunt. **Ben:** *Fallout* is the big one for me, yet at the same time *Ghost Protocol* has the Burj Khalifa sequence, which might be the greatest *Mission* sequence.

Chris: Christopher McQuarrie is the great working relationship of Cruise's career. McQuarrie also co-wrote *Edge Of Tomorrow*. It's a Tom Cruise movie for people who don't like Tom Cruise. For the Tom Cruise fans, it's great. And if you don't like Tom Cruise? Well, this is the movie where he dies a whole bunch.

Helen: It's the process of becoming Tom Cruise, that movie. He starts off as this absolute coward and then ends up as Tom Cruise.

Beth: He's an actor that can take a goddamn punch. He gets knocked down and he just gets back up again. The triumphs that he has earned.

Ben: I've got a couple of films on my list where he's not playing the action hero. *War Of The Worlds* is a really, really good Spielberg movie and a great Tom Cruise

movie. He's playing against type, as a desperate dad who's about to lose his shit, and that's an interesting mode for him to play.

Helen: He's a bad dad. And there's an element of redemption there without hitting you over the head.

Ben: But *Minority Report* is not on my list. I like it but it's a very chilly film.

Chris: What's your favourite Cruise performance?

Beth: It's got to be Frank in *Magnolia*. It was fascinating to see Cruise in an ensemble, and I love how Anderson mined his star power to turn him into this absolute monster. That is peak, weird, shitty Cruise.

Amon: I think his best performance is *Born On The Fourth Of July*. He starts as this very eager guy who wanted to go to war, then a guy who's been affected by it, and then a full-blown activist. And I want to give a shout-out to *Tropic Thunder*.

Helen: I'm going to go for *Jerry Maguire* because of my Tom Cruise Is A Duck theory.

Chris: Huh?

Helen: Basically, Tom Cruise is a bit like a duck, because on the surface he floats along serenely.

Chris: And he also likes bread.

Helen: I don't think he does, actually. But under the surface, there's this enormous amount of activity going on, and things are going crazy. And in *Jerry Maguire* the camera's right at the waterline so you get to see the serenity and the craziness.

Amon: "Show me the money!" is an all-time great Cruise moment.

Chris: I'm going to go for *Collateral*. Vincent is such an unrepentant bastard that I wish he played unrepentant bastards more often.

Beth: I have a very soft spot for *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Helen: I think people went into that expecting a sexy Tom Cruise thriller, and it's the least sexy thing. It's about obsession and fear and desire and weird self-control and boundary issues. It's extremely uncomfortable.

Beth: It breaks my heart that it got panned as much as it did.

Helen: It's really good. It's just not easy.

Chris: Right, enough squabbling. Let's vote!

THE TOP TEN

1



JERRY MAGUIRE (1996)

Helen: "Cruise at his most charismatic and most desperate, this is both a hilarious and deeply emotional role."

2



EDGE OF TOMORROW (2014)

Chris: "A twisting, turning time-loop flick that gets better on each viewing. Cruise is a comedy goldmine too."

3



MAGNOLIA (1999)

Beth: "Cruise was hesitant about the role, but no need; the actor offered a devastating display of vulnerability."

4



A FEW GOOD MEN (1992)

Amon: "Cruise is a match for Aaron Sorkin's all-time great screenplay, and the final showdown remains iconic."

5



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - FALLOUT (2018)

Amon: "Insane stunts, a sharp script, great direction: the best entry so far."

6



COLLATERAL (2004)

Chris: "Cruise's only Michael Mann film, playing a hitman searching for meaning. Ice-cold, often brilliant."

7



THE COLOR OF MONEY (1986)

Ben: "Contrasting a cocky Cruise with the iconic cool of Paul Newman sent this right into the corner pocket."

8



MINORITY REPORT (2002)

Helen: "Spielberg and Cruise are commercial gold; what's impressive is how boundary-pushing this also is."

9



RAIN MAN (1988)

Chris: "This wouldn't work if Cruise hadn't provided a solid base for Dustin Hoffman's Oscar-winning role."

10



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE (1996)

Ben: "Lacks the insane action of the later films — but who needs it when you have Cruise dangling on a wire?"

=



TOP GUN (1986)

Beth: "So hot was the competition that we had to crash in a bonus 11th: Tony Scott's airborne thrill-fest."

AGREE? DISAGREE? WRITE IN AND TELL US AT: LETTERS@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM / @EMPIREMAGAZINE

6 OF THE BEST

PICK OF
THE MONTH

Team *Empire* on the month's essential movies



DUNE

OUT JANUARY TBC / CERT TBC / 155 MINS

DVD BR 4K

Denis Villeneuve's majestic adaptation of Frank Herbert's epic sci-fi novel could have disappeared up its own sandworm in a million different ways. David Lynch already found that to his cost. The danger of adapting a seminal work like this is that it can feel derivative of the movies that pre-date it, but which themselves were inspired by Herbert's story, but Villeneuve skirts all the pitfalls, creating a universe that feels bold and exciting and fresh. Taking things like the Gom Jabbar and sandworms seriously helps, even if it's not as po-faced as its reputation suggests, while the visuals are top-notch. And when it explodes into action, Villeneuve's handling of the set-pieces is peerless. *Part II* can't come soon enough. **CHRIS HEWITT**



SNOWTOWN

OUT 31 JANUARY / CERT 18 / 119 MINS

BR

This disturbing, Australian true-crime drama was the debut feature of Justin Kurzel, who went on to make the Michael Fassbender *Macbeth* and *True History Of The Kelly Gang*. In a seedy Adelaide suburb, a glum teenager (Lucas Pittaway) is drawn into the criminal gang of his mother's new boyfriend John Bunting (Daniel Henshall). A serial killer posing as a vigilante, Bunting becomes a malevolent influence on the directionless lad. Kurzel evokes the neglect, abuse and numbing hopelessness of the teenager's no-hope life, to the point that the charismatic Bunting (Henshall is outstandingly horrible) seems like some sort of saviour before the extent of his appalling crimes becomes apparent. Not a pretty picture, but hard to forget. **KIM NEWMAN**



THE NEST

OUT 24 JANUARY / CERT 15 / 107 MINS

DVD BR

Movies have not been kind to marriage of late, and here writer-director Sean Durkin pokes at the institution with the same surgical precision he brought to the story of a cult survivor in *Martha Marcy May Marlene*. Carrie Coon is phenomenal as the woman trying to maintain her sanity as her financial-trader husband (Jude Law) recklessly drags them from New York to London for a fresh start, yet is unable to escape his own failings as a husband, father and provider. Set in the 1980s and staged ostensibly as a horror film, *The Nest* doesn't need the genre's traditional tropes to expose the rot at the heart of a marriage beset by bitterness, disappointment and resentment.

DAVID HUGHES



HERSELF

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 97 MINS

DVD BR

The American myth of rugged individualism haunts cinema, but perhaps we're beginning to look beyond that. Instead of the lone-wolf hero, here's a damaged heroine who learns that you sometimes need other people to help you, and that's okay. Sandra (co-writer Clare Dunne) leaves her abusive partner, two young daughters in tow, and attempts to start a new life — but it's not easy. A kindly employer (Harriet Walter) offers land to build a tiny house, but Sandra has to overcome her own terrors to ask for, and accept, the help she needs to build it. Phyllida Lloyd's Dublin-set drama is a beautifully performed, understated film, and makes a case for the kind of collective action the world needs to face our greatest challenges. **HELEN O'HARA**



CENSOR

OUT 31 JANUARY / CERT 18 / 84 MINS.

BR

A woman's descent into psychosis takes place against a video-nasty landscape in Prano Bailey-Bond's forensically crafted, 1980s-set horror. Niamh Algar stars as Enid, a prim film censor still wrestling with the trauma of losing her sister during childhood. After she believes she has found her in one of the films she's assessing, Enid embarks on a warped mission to get her back. Bailey-Bond has assembled a vivid world for her debut that draws on the heightened aesthetic of the morally challenging movies featured, yet still feels unique. Meanwhile, an ever-impressive Algar grounds Enid's unravelling with a textured performance that makes *Censor* a singular story about grief and what happens to those left behind. **BETH WEBB**



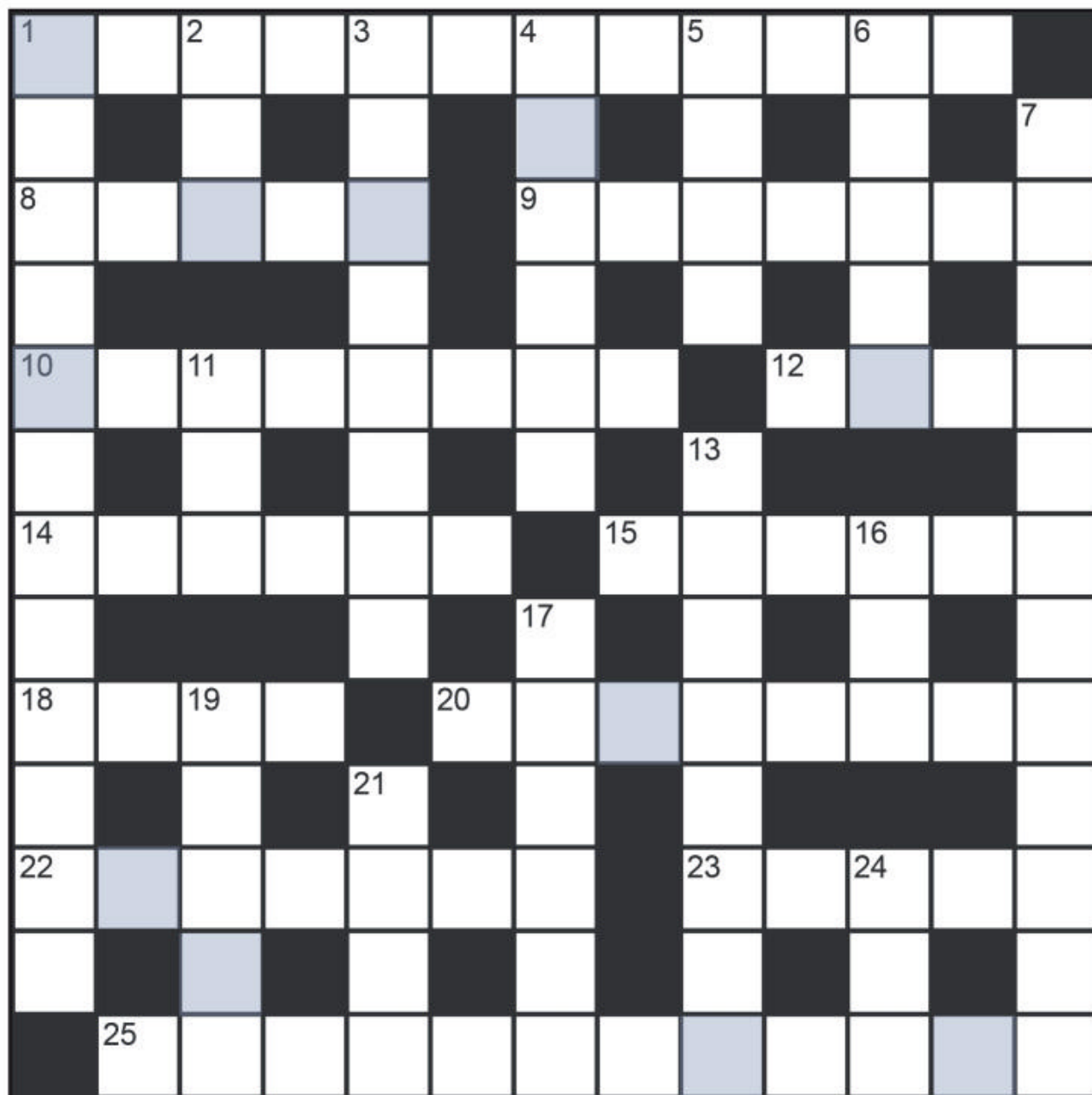
RAGING FIRE

OUT 31 JANUARY / CERT 15 / 126 MINS

DVD BR

Directed by the late Benny Chan, who sadly died during post-production, *Raging Fire* tells a fairly standard cops-and-robbers story, but with a do-or-die energy that feels like a throwback to Hong Kong action cinema at its finest. Donnie Yen plays Cheung, a cop out for vengeance after his colleagues are killed by a mysterious group of criminals with connections to his precinct's murky past. Mixing brutal hand-to-hand throw-downs with visceral gunfights that wouldn't feel out of place in Michael Mann's *Heat*, *Raging Fire* does its best storytelling during its complex, multi-layered set-pieces — the rawness and tactility of which feels like an oasis amongst a year of overly busy, CGI-laden blockbusters. **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL**

CROSSWORD AND COMPETITION



ACROSS

- 1 Naked actor who is Hogwarts' Remus Lupin (5,7)
- 8 Jessica who was in remakes of *Cape Fear* and *King Kong* (5)
- 9 Eli, "the Ugly" (7)
- 10 Could be Joan, could be Broderick (8)
- 12 Annabelle, Woody or maybe even Vivian Blaine (4)
- 14 South Korean vampire movie from director Park Chan-Wook (6)
- 15 In which Ryan Reynolds wakes up in a coffin (6)
- 18 Ancient order that embraces the dark side (4)
- 20 Game played by Keira Knightley, Parminder Nagra and Dee Hepburn (8)
- 22 Gould, the original Trapper John and an associate of Danny Ocean (7)
- 23 One of the Little Women or what it is the penguins do (5)
- 25 *From Here To Eternity* soldier and *On The Town* sailor (5,7)

DOWN

- 1 Cult French film by Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro (12)
- 2 His name is Diesel (3)
- 3 Richard, who was Matt Hooper and Roy Neary (8)
- 4 It's Hughes or Hawks... or a duck (6)
- 5 True-life story in which Reese Witherspoon stars as a woman on a 1,000-mile hike (4)
- 6 *My Own Private* — (River Phoenix) (5)
- 7 First film for which Tom Hanks won an Oscar (12)
- 11 *Midsommar* director Aster (3)
- 13 Occupation of Snow White's friend Eric (8)
- 16 Actress and filmmaker Lupino (3)
- 17 Julianne Moore was expecting nine of them with Hugh Grant (6)
- 19 Durden, who does not talk about Fight Club (5)
- 21 It links fall, light and struck in film titles (4)
- 24 "Come out and take it," snarled James Cagney, "you dirty yellow-bellied —" (3)

COMPETITION ENDS 14 FEBRUARY

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, director or character. Visit www.empireonline.com/crossword and fill out the form along with your answer in the provided field. Entry is free and closes at midnight on 14 February. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

FEBRUARY ANSWERS ACROSS: 1 Assault, 5 Cars, 10 Close-up, 11 Earth, 12 East, 13 Twelve, 16 Oldman, 18 Taylor, 20 Sidney, 21 Owen, 25 Clift, 26 Niagara, 27 Rose, 28 Poitier.

DOWN: 2 Shoes, 3 Alex, 4 Lupita, 6 Arrival, 7 Soho, 8 Acheron, 9 General, 14 Magneto, 15 Brendan, 17 Dailies, 19 Nyong'o, 22 Whale, 23 Scar, 24 Hart.

ANAGRAM THE PENGUIN

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Entries are free. Entries must be received before 15 February or will not be valid. The Competition is only open to people aged 18 and over who live in the United Kingdom and are not a Bauer employee or their immediate family. One winner will be selected at random from all valid entries. Competition promoted by H Bauer Publishing t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final, and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, via email, between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will email the winner a maximum of three times. If the winner does not respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner at random and the original winner will not win a prize. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full T&Cs see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>

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Frankenstein

Chosen by **TOM SAVINI**

TOM SAVINI: “My favourite scene would have to be Boris Karloff backing into the doorway, as the Frankenstein Monster, and turning around. When you’re a kid — eight, nine years old — you totally believe Frankenstein [the Monster] existed. I had no idea about make-up or any of that stuff. That’s the sad thing about learning to do make-up. You destroy that magic. I wish I could see the movie again, through the eyes of an eight-year-old child. Because when he turns around... holy shit.”

INT. FRANKENSTEIN’S LABORATORY — DAY

Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive) sits at his table, smoking. Dr Waldman (Edward Van Sloan) paces behind him.

FRANKENSTEIN: Oh, come and sit down, Doctor. You must be patient. Do you expect perfection at once?

WALDMAN: [Banging the table, then sitting down] This creature of yours should be kept under guard! Mark my words, he will prove dangerous!

FRANKENSTEIN: Dangerous? Poor old Waldman. Have you

never wanted to do anything that was dangerous? Where should we be if nobody tried to find out what lies beyond? Have you never wanted to look beyond the clouds and the stars? Or to know what causes the trees to bud, and what changes a darkness into light? [He laughs] But if you talk like that, people would call you crazy. Well, if I could discover just one of these things, what eternity is, for example, I wouldn’t care if they did think I was crazy.

WALDMAN: You’re young, my friend. Your success has intoxicated you. Wake up and look facts in the face! Here we have a fiend whose brain...

FRANKENSTEIN: Whose brain must be given time to develop. It’s a perfectly good brain, Doctor. Well, you ought to know. It came from your own laboratory.

WALDMAN: The brain that was stolen from my laboratory was a criminal brain.

Frankenstein is somewhat startled by this, but then shrugs it off.

FRANKENSTEIN: Oh, well. After all, it’s only a piece of dead tissue.

WALDMAN: Only evil can come of it. Your health will be ruined if you persist in this madness.

FRANKENSTEIN: I’m astonishingly sane, Doctor.

WALDMAN: You have created a monster, and it will destroy you!

FRANKENSTEIN: Patience, patience. I believe in this monster, as you call it. And if you don’t... well, you must leave me alone.

WALDMAN: But think of Elizabeth! Your father!

FRANKENSTEIN: Elizabeth believes in me. My father... [He chuckles, darkly] He never believes in anyone. I’ve got to experiment further. He’s only

a few days old, remember. So far he’s been kept in complete darkness. Wait ’til I bring him into the light.

Frankenstein hears something. Footsteps. Slow, shambling footsteps approaching the laboratory.

FRANKENSTEIN: Here he comes. Let’s turn out the light.

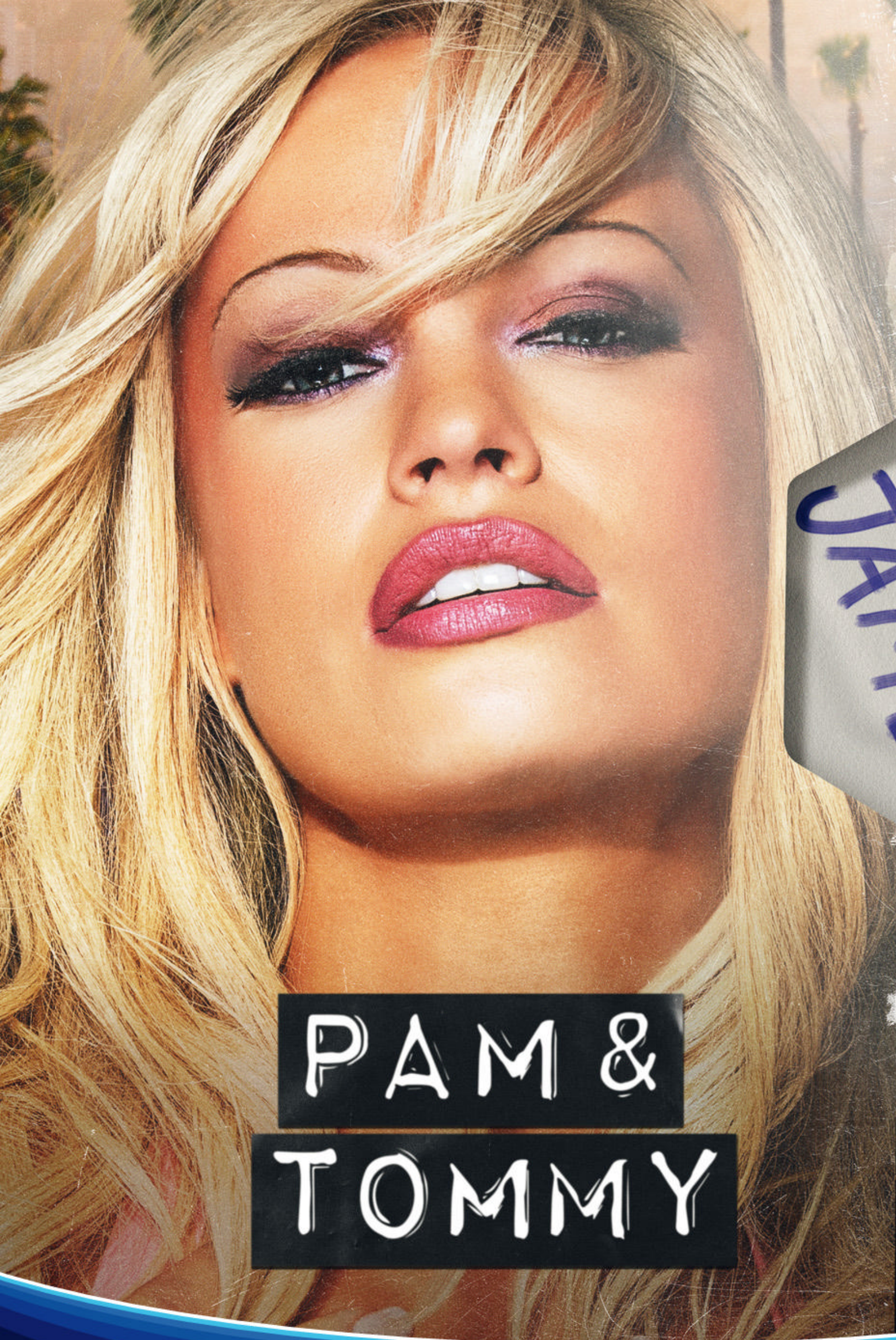
Frankenstein stands and turns out the light above the table. Waldman gets up and moves closer to the door. Both men look on as...

The door of the lab opens, and a tall, hulking figure, shrouded in shadow, opens the door. But he is walking in reverse, pushing it open with his back.

The figure (Boris Karloff) turns. As the light hits his face, we see that it’s horrifying: the expansive forehead marked by a scar. Bolts protrude from his neck. And the eyes are utterly dead. Meet the Monster.

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